

Gal 10th
SELECT
DISCOURSES

FROM THE
AMERICAN PREACHER,

(A Work of which three Volumes are already published in America).

BY SOME OF THE MOST EMINENT
EVANGELICAL MINISTERS
IN THE
UNITED STATES.



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TO THE PUBLIC.

THAT this selection from the first three volumes of the American Preacher, may be purchased at a cheap rate, and thus have a more general spread and usefulness, all the sermons before meetings of the clergy are omitted, except one by the late President Wither Spoon. A few excellent discourses on doctrinal and practical subjects are also left out, as other sermons on the same subjects of equal merit have been lately published in Britain. If this selection meets with the expected encouragement, another volume will be published when sufficient materials are received from America.

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SERMON I.

ON

MINISTERIAL CHARACTER AND DUTY.

BY

JOHN WITHERSPOON, D.D. LL.D.

COL. N. C. P.

2 COR. iv. 13.

We also believe, and therefore speak.

TO understand what ought to be the character, and what principles should animate the conduct of a minister of the gospel, cannot be without profit, even to a private Christian. It will teach him whom to prefer, when he is called, in providence, to make a choice. It will teach him to hold such in reputation for their office-sake, and to improve the privilege of a regular gospel-ministry, if he himself is favoured with it. And I think it must incline him to make daily supplication to the Lord of the harvest, to send forth faithful labourers into his harvest.

But though there were no such general advantage to be derived from it, my particular charge, and the very aspect of this audience, would easily justify me in making this, for once, the immediate subject of discourse.

Now if we would know the character of a faithful minister, we cannot better, or more immediately reach our

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purpose,

purpose, than by looking into the character, and observing the conduct, and springs of action, of the Apostles of our Lord, who received their commissions immediately from himself, and were not only the first, but the best and most successful ministers, that ever were employed in the church of Christ.

The Apostle Paul, whose call was so singular, and whose labours were so distinguished, has, in his epistles to the several churches, planted or watered by him, given us a great light into the chief aims he had in the exercise of the ministry. In this chapter, and the preceding part of this epistle, he shews the Corinthians, with what visible faithfulness and sincerity he had acted, and what diligence he had used in promoting their eternal happiness.

To save time, I forbear going through the connection of his discourse, and only observe, that in the words of our text, he shows what kept him faithful, and influenced him to so much diligence in the work to which he was called, by alluding to an expression in the 116th Psalm. It is written, *I have believed, therefore have I spoken. We also believe, and therefore speak.* In this he intimates, that our inward persuasion of the great truths of the everlasting Gospel, could not but have a powerful influence upon him and others, to press the important message, and watch over the souls of those committed to their charge.

In discoursing further at this time, I intend to confine myself to this single truth, which may be easily deduced from the text: That one of the most essentially necessary, and the most extensively useful qualifications of a good minister, is, that he be a good man, that he have a firm belief of that gospel he is called to preach, and a lively sense of religion upon his own heart. After I shall have explained and confirmed this observation, I will conclude with some practical reflections.

Though

Though I have mentioned real religion as one of the most essentially necessary qualifications, I am not ignorant, that taking the words in a strict sense, gifts are more necessary to the being of the ministry, than even grace itself. To make the efficacy of the ordinances to depend upon the inward state of the administrator, is a Popish error, and is expressly guarded against by the Assembly of Divines, in our shorter Catechisms, in the following words: *The Sacraments, and it is equally true of every other ordinance, become effectual to salvation, not from any virtue in them, or in him that doth administer them, but only by the blessing of Christ, and the working of his Spirit in them, that by faith receive them.*

But some degree of capacity is evidently necessary in the most absolute sense. A man who is altogether void of knowledge and utterance, or who is deaf and dumb, may be a saint, but cannot be a minister. This concession, however, takes nothing from the force of the observation, that real religion is of the greatest importance, and most absolutely necessary to the *faithful* discharge of a minister's sacred trust. That I may set this in as clear and strong a light as I am able, let me intreat your attention to the following observations:

I. Real religion in a minister, will make him knowing, and able for his work. It is necessary for any one who intends himself for the office of the ministry, by diligent study, and the use of those means, with which God in his providence hath furnished him, to improve his understanding, and acquire a stock of knowledge, that he may be a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. In this he can have no such incitement as concern for his Master's glory. Nay, he that is truly religious, is taught of God, the best of ma-

sters, and will have some of his most profitable lessons from his own experience.

Let me the rather intreat your attention to this, that those who are most apt to disparage piety are also apt to speak in terms of high approbation on the subject of literature and science—Observe, therefore, that true religion serves both to give a man that knowledge which is necessary to a minister, and to direct and turn into its proper channel the knowledge which he may otherwise acquire. It is an approved maxim in every science, that practical and experimental knowledge far exceeds that which is merely speculative; at least, though the last may make the prettiest show, the first, is by much to be preferred for use. Any wise man, if he was to go a dangerous voyage, would readily prefer as his pilot, one, who had much experience, and had sailed often that way himself, to one, who had studied navigation in the most perfect manner ashore. So, my brethren, every man who regards his soul would choose for his *spiritual* guide, one, who appears to have the wisdom to save his own, and would expect by him to be best directed, how to avoid the rocks and shelves in his passage, through this dangerous and tempestuous ocean of life.

But if this maxim holds true in other science, it holds yet more strongly in religion, which cannot be truly known unless it be felt. There is an inseparable connection between faith and practice, truth and duty; and therefore he that is a stranger to the one, is ignorant of the other. I am not insensible that a bad man may espouse, and plead for a great part of the system of divine truth; but as he cannot cordially embrace it, so I am inclined to think that he never truly understands it. The Apostle Paul declares, that it is only by the Spirit of God which is given to every real Christian, and more especially to every faithful minister, that a man is enabled to
treat

treat rightly of divine things, Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God, that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God; which things we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned. As the real Christian from that character is best disposed to seek after, so he is by the same means best fitted to improve and apply his knowledge of spiritual things. This will appear, if we consider what ought to be the great work of a minister. He hath to do chiefly with the hearts and consciences of his people. His business is to convince the ungodly; to awaken the secure; to enlighten the ignorant; to direct and strengthen the weak in the faith, and in general as a wise physician, to administer the medicine proper to the various conditions and disorders of his hearers. Now it must, at first sight, appear, that he who is a stranger to the power of godliness, and knows nothing of the spiritual life himself, must be utterly unfit for discerning how it thrives, or assisting and promoting it in others. That man must surely be most powerful in searching, and most skilful in guiding the consciences of others, who has been accustomed to examine and direct his own.

I only farther observe upon this particular, that true religion will purify, and direct into its proper channel, the knowledge he may otherwise acquire. It is a great mistake to think, sound learning is an enemy to religion, and to suppose that an ignorant ministry is the best or safest. There is no branch of human knowledge of which a divine may not be the better, or which a good man will not improve to the glory of God and the good of others; though some of them are more important than others;

and it is necessary to give to any of them, only such proportion of our time, as is consistent with our great and principal aim. Now true religion is the great preservative against mistake or abuse of any kind on this subject. A bad man is apt to study, merely to gratify his own fancy; and there is a false luxury and delicacy in feeding the mind as well as the body. A bad man is also exceedingly prone to intellectual pride and self-sufficiency; than which, there is not a vice more dangerous in itself, or more contrary to the character of a minister of the New Testament. But he who is sanctified by Divine grace, as he has every motive to diligence in acquiring knowledge, so the single purpose to which he will wish to apply it, is to serve God in the gospel of his Son.

II. Real religion in a minister will make him happy and chearful, ready and willing to do his duty. There is a great difference between the prompt, and speedy obedience of a servant who loves his master and his work, and the reluctant labour of him who only deceives him, that he may eat of his bread. A truly pious man undertakes the office of the ministry from love to God, with a view to promote his glory, and what he hath counted his interest in the world, *viz.* The welfare of the souls of men. An unholy minister undertakes this employment only as a trade to earn by, and has it at least as his highest aim to promote his own worldly advantage. It is easy to see in what a different manner these different persons will act, and in what different light they will view the sacred duties of their function. He who truly believes the gospel and loves its Author, will reckon it his highest honour when he is called to recommend it to the belief of others. He will be apt to teach, and will find a pleasure in carrying his message, besides the reward he expects from him who employs him, and will undergo with chearfulness every fatigue he is subjected to in the execution

execution of his office. On the other hand, he who is actuated by a contrary principle, though he is obliged, that he may raise his wages, in some sort to do his duty; yet how heavily must it go on, how tedious and burdensome must it be, both in preparation and performance? He will count his service at the altar, and his work among his people, as a toil and drudgery, and reckon all that redeemed time that he can save for himself, from the duties of his office.

Perhaps it may be thought that there lies a strong objection against this observation from experience; as it appears that such ministers as have least of religion, commonly go most lightly under the charge, and are far from feeling any burden in what is committed to them; whereas the most pious and faithful ministers seem to have a weight upon their spirits, and such a concern for the salvation of their people, as cannot but take much from their cheerfulness in the work to which they are called. In answer to this, observe, that an unfaithful minister is not easy and cheerful because his work is agreeable to him, but because he takes as little of it as may be, and seeks his pleasure more than his duty. Certain it is, that the work of the ministry must be irksome and uneasy to him that believes not, except so far as he makes it subservient to ambition, and displays his own talents when he should be feeding his people's souls. This I confess, which the Apostle justly calls preaching ourselves, may be abundantly gratifying to the most corrupt heart. On the other hand, that concern for his people which is upon the heart of every faithful pastor, is far from being inconsistent with the most solid peace and desirable pleasure arising from the discharge of his duty. It is like the exercise of pity and compassion to the distressed, in him, who is acting for their relief, which, though in some sense painful, is yet accompanied with the approbation of God,

and conscience, as flowing from a rightly disposed mind, and therefore to be cherished and cultivated rather than suppressed. There is a time for every good man to mourn, and a time to rejoice, and perhaps the one is even more salutary than the other; for we are told, that God will appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, *to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.*

III. Real religion in a minister will make him faithful, and impartial in the discharge of his trust. The God in whose presence we stand, and in whose name we speak, is no respecter of persons, and neither should we be in doing his work. There is commonly a great variety of persons, of different stations, and of different characters, committed to the inspection of a minister; the pleasing or displeasing of whom, has a considerable influence in his wordly ease and interest. This is a great temptation to be unfaithful, and often leads to speak unto them *smooth things*, and *prophecy deceit*; or at least, not to deal with all that freedom and impartiality, that his duty to God requires. In every unregenerate man, wordly interest in one shape or another, either vanity or gain, is the supreme motive of action; and therefore, as most men are impatient of reproof, it cannot be supposed, that an un sanctified minister will venture to provoke their displeasure, or to gall them with unacceptable truths. The favour of the great, or the applause of the multitude, he certainly will seek more than the edification of any. On the other hand, he who truly fears God, and believes what he teaches, will act with faithfulness and boldness. He will remember, that if he seeks to please men, he cannot be the servant of Christ. He will therefore no farther obtain, and indeed no farther wish to obtain their favour, than as a diligent discharge of his duty approves

him

him to their consciences in the sight of God, or forces the approbation of the impartial, notwithstanding the resentment of particular offenders. It is only the fear of God can deliver us from the fear of man. I do not pretend that all who fear God are wholly delivered from it; but surely, bad men must be far more under the government of this sinful principle. The one may fail occasionally, the other is corrupted wholly. There are two reasons which incline me particularly to insist on that faithfulness, which can only flow from true piety.

1. That preaching, in order to be useful, must be very particular, and close in the application. General truths, and abstract reasoning, have little or no influence upon the hearers, as the ignorant cannot, and the wise will not apply them to themselves.

2. The other reason is, that private admonition, and personal reproof, are a great part of a minister's duty, and a duty that cannot be performed by any man who hath not a steady regard to the presence and command of that God, who hath set him to watch for the souls of his people, as one that must give an account.

IV. Real religion in a minister will make him active and laborious in his work. Diligence is absolutely necessary to the right discharge of the pastoral duties, whether public or private. It requires no small attention and labour to seek out fit and acceptable words, as the preacher expresses it, to stir up the attention of the inconsiderate, to awaken secure, and convince obstinate sinners, to unmask the covered hearts of hypocrites, to set right the erring, and encourage the fearful. An unbelieving minister must be careless and slothful. As he is unconcerned about the success of his work, he cannot have any great concern about the manner of performance. But he who believes the unspeakable importance of what he is employed

ployed about, both to himself, and to his people, cannot fail to be diligent. He knows, that he himself must answer to God for the care he has taken of the souls committed to his charge, and that if he does not faithfully warn the wicked to turn from their ways, their blood will be required at his hand.

Oh! my brethren, what a striking consideration is this, to suppose ourselves interrogated by the Supreme Judge, concerning every sinner under our charge? Did you earnestly warn this unhappy soul, by earnest exhortations in public, and by serious affectionate expostulations in private, to consider his ways? It is an easy thing, by a partial or cursory performance of our duty, to screen ourselves from the censure of our fellow-men; but to stand at the judgment-seat of Christ, and answer there for our diligence, is a more awful trial.

Will not also a concern for his people's interest, animate a pious minister to diligence? If he is truly pious, as he loves God, he loves his brother also. The Apostle Paul says, *Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.* If a man in good earnest, believes, that everlasting misery must be the portion of all who die in an unrenowned state, what pains will he not take, to prevent sinners from going to that place of torment?

One who could see a fellow-creature, in the rage of a fever, rushing to the brink of a precipice, and not restrain him, would fall under lasting infamy. Must not the same compassion move the heart of a serious person, who sees his fellow-sinners going blindfold to the pit of perdition?

It is their not believing these things, that makes them so fearless in sinning; if you truly believe them, will you not make an effort to alarm them? There are no motives like these to diligence,—he that believes, will certainly speak.

V. In

V. In the last place, real Religion will make a minister successful in his work. This it does, both as it fits him for doing his duty to his people, which has been illustrated above, and as it adds to his precepts *the force of his example*. First, it makes him successful, as it fits him for his duty. It is true indeed, that God only can give the blessing upon a minister's labours, and that he can save by many, or by few, by the weakest, as well as by the ablest instrument; yet we see from experience, that in all ordinary cases, he proportions the success to the propriety, or sufficiency of the means. Neither is there any surer mark, that God intends effectual benefit to any part of the world or the church, than when he raises and commissions men eminently qualified to plead his cause. Therefore, real piety, even in this respect, contributes to a minister's success. If diligence in all other things produces success, it must be so also in the ministry. If he that lays out his ground with the greatest judgment, prepares and dresses it with the greatest care, has the most plentiful crop; if the shepherd that waits most diligently upon his flock, feeds them in the best pasture, and leads them to the safest shelter, has the most increase; then that minister, who does his duty most wisely and most powerfully, will also see most of the fruit of his labours.

But real and unaffected, yet visible seriousness, has also its own proper additional influence on a minister's success. An apparent and visible impression upon the speaker's mind, of what he says, gives it an inexpressible weight with the hearers. There is a piercing heat, a penetrating force, in that which flows from the heart, which distinguishes it not only from the coldness of indifference, but also, from the false fire of enthusiasm or vain-glory. Besides all this, the example of a pious minister, is a constant instruction to his people. It ratifies his doctrine,
while

while he not only charges them to do what he says, but to be what he is. This will receive much illustration from its contrary.

A minister who has a careless, untender walk, defeats, by his life, the intent of his preaching. Though in reason, it cannot justify any one in disobeying wholesome instructions, that the instructor despises them himself; yet it is one of the most common excuses men make for themselves, and few excuses seem to set their consciences more at ease. Loose and careless persons think themselves quite at liberty to despise the reproofs of their pastor, if, while he teaches others, he teaches not himself.

Nay, not only is it thus with the profane, but even those who have the greatest regard for religion, are not so much affected with the same truths, when spoken by one they think indifferent about them, as when spoken by one, who seems to feel what he speaks, and who lives as he teaches.

Experience greatly confirms the whole of this reasoning—for wherever an eminently pious minister has lived, and laboured long, there is commonly to be found the most knowing, serious, sober-minded, and judicious people; nay, the very memory of such a minister is often long continued after he is gone, and his example is proposed by his hearers to their children's children.

From all these considerations, I conclude, that the most important qualification of a good minister, is, to be a *believing preacher*, and that, if he saves his own soul, he will be the probable mean of saving them that hear him.

I proceed now, to make some improvement of the subject.

Reverend Fathers and Brethren,

As we would wish our people to do, let us take heed how we hear, and make a faithful application to ourselves, of what hath been said upon the subject. Let it engage

engage us to a serious examination of ourselves, lest while we preach the gospel to others, we ourselves should be reprobates. This ought to be the subject of our frequent and serious thoughts, for several reasons. We are in danger of thinking ourselves too easily safe, by comparing that outward regularity, to which our office itself, even from secular motives, obliges us, with the licentious extravagance of profane sinners. We are in danger of mistaking our frequent thinking and speaking of the things of God, in the way of our calling, for an evidence of true religion, in ourselves. We may also, perhaps, mistake those gifts with which God hath furnished us, for the benefit of his own people, as the fruits of the Spirit, and of gracious dispositions in our hearts. A minister is as much liable to self-deceit as others, and in some respects more so. We have therefore much need, often to make trial of our state, as well as to give all diligence to make our calling and election sure.

But let us beware of imagining, that this discourse is only applicable to such, as have no real faith in Christ. God forbid! that there were any minister among us, a complete unbeliever, counting the gospel a fable. But faith, and every other gracious disposition grafted upon it, are capable of many degrees of improvement and strength; and in proportion to the strength of our faith, and the impression we have of divine things, will be our diligence, and consequently our success, in the work of the ministry. Let us therefore impress our minds, with a more and more lively sense, of the important truths which we teach and hear. Let us not starve ourselves, while we are feeding others: but study to arrive at a greater degree of love to God, and delight in him; a greater conformity to his blessed image, in purity of heart, and integrity of life. Let us in a special manner, study to attain to more and more intimate communion with
God

God in secret, which is the sign of our dependence upon him, and the very exercise of love to him, which is the mean of constancy, and the source of joy in religion.

Above all, let us set our affections upon the things that are above, where our Redeemer sits, at his Father's right hand. As our profession is to be pilgrims, and strangers in the earth, to live by faith, and not by sight; let us study, to raise our hopes of, and desire after, the heavenly inheritance. By this, we shall not only believe, but know and feel the value of true religion, which cannot fail to make us diligent in seeking the good of others.

Oh! my brethren, what reason have we to be inwardly ashamed at the weakness of our faith, and the coldness of our love, as they shew themselves, by our indifference in the duties of our office? We are often ready both to complain and wonder, that our hearers are so little affected with the most awful considerations; that they can hear with indifference of everlasting happiness, and sit without fear under the denunciations of eternal wrath; that we cannot persuade them, it is of importance to think what shall become of them for ever. But is it not also to be wondered at, that we ourselves can often speak of these things with so little emotion? Can we ever be sufficiently affected with the danger of our hearers, when we consider, that we must either save them by convincing and converting them now, or deliver our own souls, by witnessing, justifying, and perhaps pleading for their condemnation at the last day? However plain and simple these truths are, of the final judgment of ministers and people, they are quite unfathomable in their meaning and importance to both. It is strange that we can think of them without the deepest concern, or even speak of them without tears.

Let us pray that the Lord would increase our faith, that believing we may speak, and that our speech may
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be with such efficacy, by the blessing of God, as many sinners may be thereby brought to everlasting life; that we may approve ourselves to Him that sent us; and that when Christ, the chief Shepherd shall appear, we may receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

SERMON II.

MAN IN HIS NATURAL STATE.

BY

JOHN WITHERSPOON, D. D. LL. D.

COL. N. C. P.

REV. iii. 17.

Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.

IN order to preach the gospel with success, it is necessary that we should begin, by establishing the great and fundamental truths, on which all the rest are built, and to which they constantly refer. Nay, it is necessary that we should often look back to these, and see that we be not off the foundation, or that it be not weakly, or imperfectly laid. Of this sort, I take the guilt, misery, and weakness

weakness of our nature to be ; and therefore have chosen the words now read, as the subject of discourse, in which the Spirit of God reproves the sufficiency, and self-righteousness of the church of Laodicea.

Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased in goods, &c. I suppose you will all easily understand, that the words are figurative, and are spoken entirely with a view to the spiritual state of that church. In this light, let us consider what is precisely their meaning.

We may either suppose, that this charge is brought against the church of Laodicea, because there were many there, under the profession of the gospel, who were notwithstanding, still in a natural unrenewed state—strangers to the power of religion ; of which, their being thus unhumbled, and insensible of their guilt and misery, was the evidence ; and for which, the remedy is prescribed in the following words : *I counsel thee to buy of me gold, tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich, and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear ; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see.*

Or we may suppose, that this reproof was in a great measure applicable to them all in general, believers and unbelievers ; the best of them, being exceedingly prone to trust in themselves, that they were righteous ; instead of that humble dependence on the merit and grace of their Redeemer, which ought not only to be the refuge of the sinner, but the confidence of the saint. And there is no question, that this is a proper caution to professing Christians in every age, to beware of splitting on the rock of self-sufficiency.

But as this disposition reigns in the heart of every one that is yet at a distance from God, is the foundation of their security and impenitence, and is what they must be brought

brought off from before they can be reconciled to God; it is for their benefit that I chiefly design this discourse, though it may also be useful, and shall be in part applied to the children of God. It is an affecting thought when pursued to its consequences; yet, alas! it is unquestionably true, that in every assembly, *such as this*, of professing Christians, there are not a few, who are in *the gail of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity*, under the wrath of God, and liable to the condemning sentence of his law; and at the same time, that the far greatest part of them are ignorant of it, and know not that they are *wretched, and poor, and blind, and naked*.

In discoursing farther upon this subject, therefore, I shall,

I. Endeavour to prove and illustrate this truth, that all mankind are by nature in a state of sin and misery, under the bondage of corruption, and liable to the wrath of God.

II. I shall briefly shew you, that being brought to a lively sense, and genuine conviction of this, is the first and a necessary step to the saving knowledge of God in Christ.—And, in the *last place*, Shall make some practical improvement of the subject.

I. In the first place, then, I am to prove and illustrate this truth, that all mankind are by nature in a state of sin and misery, under the bondage of corruption, and liable to the wrath of God. What is said in this passage of the Laodiceans, is universally true of the posterity of Adam. Unless an inward and essential change has been wrought upon them by the grace of God, they are *wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked*.

It is also true of them, as well as the Laodiceans, that they know it not; but vainly presume themselves to be rich, and increased with goods, and to have need of nothing. If these two things are jointly true of many of you my hearers, there is nothing in which you can have so great a concern; therefore, let me earnestly beseech your most serious attention to what shall be said, as the success of this conviction is necessary to your understanding, or profiting by any other part of divine truth, as I shall afterwards shew you.

The proof of the truth here asserted, can be only of two kinds: 1. From Scripture, which is the testimony of God declaring it; 2. From the visible state of the world, and our own experience finding it to be so.

1. That all mankind are by nature in a state of sin and misery, appears from the express and repeated testimony of the word of God. And this testimony we have, not only in particular passages carrying the truth, but in the strain and spirit of the whole, and the several dispensations of Divine Providence there recorded, which are all of them built upon this supposition, and intended to remedy this universal evil.

See what God declares; Gen. vi. 5. *And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart, was only evil continually.* And again, *the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth.* We may take the Psalmist David's testimony of himself, as a sample of the rest of mankind; and indeed he plainly intimates that it is a common calamity: *Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Behold! I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.*

We may take also the testimony of the Apostle Paul in his epistle to the Romans; which is the more full to our
present

present purpose, that as he had never been at Rome, he is there laying the foundation of religion in general, and the Christian dispensation in particular, by a clear and explicit proof of the need the world had of a Saviour, from its universal corruption and depravity. See then what he says—*What then? Are we better than they? No, in no wise; for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin. As it is written, There is none righteous, no not one. And again—Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.—For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.*

You may also see, that the Apostle traces this disorder to its very source.—*Wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.*

I shall add but one express scripture-testimony more.—*And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins.*

But besides the particular passages of scripture, positively declaring this truth, the whole frame and contexture of the scriptures, and all the dispensations of Divine Providence recorded in them, are a proof of the same thing. Man is every where considered as in a fallen and sinful state. Every thing that is prescribed to him, and every thing that is done for him, goes upon that supposition. It is not one man, or a few men that are in scripture called to repentance, but all without exception. Now repentance is only the duty of a sinner. An innocent person cannot repent, he has nothing to grieve for in his heart, or to forsake in his life. It is also proper to observe, that one of the scripture-characters of God is,

transgression and sin. Now, he could not be to us a forgiving God, and there would be no need that he should be revealed under that character, unless we were sinners that stood in need of pardon. Mercy, indeed, is the distinguishing attribute of God, and this can only have respect to offenders. All the other perfections of God might be exercised towards pure and holy creatures, but mercy only towards sinners. He might be a good, holy, just, wise, powerful God to persons in a state of innocence, but he can shew mercy only to the guilty.

Do not the dispensations of God's providence shew the same thing? He sent the flood as a testimony of the wickedness of the world, and for the punishment of a guilty race. Remember also the sacrifices which were appointed and accepted by God from the beginning of the world. Sacrifices are for atonement and expiation. They are plainly a substitution in the room of a forfeited life. It is doing violence to common sense, to make them any thing else. The whole Jewish œconomy, which had in it so many sacrifices, so many offerings, so many washings and purifications, does plainly suppose the person using them to be infected with sin or moral pollution. Had not this been the case, they had been extremely absurd and improper.

But the strongest testimony of all that God hath given to the guilt and corruption of mankind, is his sending his own Son into the world to redeem them by the sacrifice of himself.—To what purpose redeem them if they were not in bondage? Why so costly an expiation if our lives had not been forfeited to Divine justice? But that it was for this purpose that Christ came into the world, is so plain from the whole of the scriptures, that I shall select but one passage out of many to prove it.—*Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood,*

blood, to declare his righteousness, for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.

What is said already on this head is a full proof from scripture, that man is now by nature in a state of sin; that he is also, in consequence of that, in a state of misery, and liable to the wrath of God, is proved by many of the same passages, and by many others.—*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.—For the wages of sin is death, &c.* But I need not multiply passages to this purpose, for in all God's dispensations, the deserved punishment of sinners is as evident as their sinfulness itself. It is indeed fully proved from the essential perfections of God, particularly his holiness and justice. He is of purer eyes than that he can behold iniquity. *Evil cannot dwell with him, nor fools, that is, sinners, stand in his sight.*

Is not all this then, my brethren, a sufficient proof from the testimony of God, that man in a natural state is sinful and miserable? Shall we affirm ourselves to be whole if he saith we are unsound? Do we know more than God? Will we not give credit to the fountain of truth? Nor is it any objection to this, that we ourselves know it not, or are but little sensible of it. One considerable part of the disease is blindness of understanding; so that we may and must, till our eyes are opened, be ignorant of our danger.—We may think and say that we are rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing; while we are *wretched and miserable, and blind and naked.*

2. The same thing appears from the visible state of the world, and our own experience. Unbelievers are apt to hear with indifference and neglect, what they are told from scripture-testimony, unless otherwise confirmed to them; and it is with the unbeliever we have now to

do. Besides, the establishment of this truth, upon other evidence than that of scripture, ought to have a powerful influence in inducing men to believe the other truths in scripture, that are connected with and founded upon it. I think it therefore highly proper to lay before you what evidence we have of our lost state, from the observation of the world, though the scriptures had been silent. I would likewise recommend to all, what shall be said on this subject, to preserve your faith unshaken, and keep you from blasphemous, unbelieving thoughts, if at any time you should be tempted to them: since, even unenlightened reason confirms the foundation of Divine truth, and nature and providence conspire in preaching the doctrine of Divine Grace.

Now, doth not our experience, as well as the observation of others, shew us, that we are born in sin, and conceived in iniquity? May we not say from our own knowledge, that the imaginations of the heart of man are only evil from his youth, and that continually? Is there not a proneness and tendency to evil, universally to be observed in mankind, and a backwardness and aversion to that which is good? Is not this apparent even in children, upon the first dawn of reason in their minds, and the first sight of choice or inclination in their hearts? Surely it must be owned, that in that early period, they are at least *comparatively* innocent.—If any among us is without sin, it must be the youngest; *yet folly is bound in the heart of a child*.—How hard is it to guard them from evil, and to inspire them with good dispositions, even by the wisest and earliest care in their instruction? And even after the most successful pains, are there not still many remaining blemishes, through the prevalence of corrupt nature, which shew, that the ground-work itself was faulty? But, on the contrary, how easily do
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men learn that which is evil? Do they need to be taught? Is it not enough to give them licence? How just is that description in Jeremiah? *They are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge.* I am far from denying, that men are improved and forwarded in sin, by instruction and example, as well as in that which is good: but it is plain, they are far apter scholars in the first than in the last; which plainly shews, they are more powerfully disposed to it by nature. Nay, is it not evident, from the universal experience and testimony of those who act from a principle of religion, that it is extremely difficult, with all the care they can take, to resist the propensity of nature to the contrary; and that in the best, it often gets the superiority, when they are off their guard? Is not this an evidence of the depravity and corruption of human nature, and its tendency to evil? Are those who hate sin often overcome by it, and shall those who love it, presume to say they are free from it?

If any should ask, how I prove that that course of action to which human nature is inclined is evil, without the assistance of scripture? I answer, from reason; and that many ways—from its pernicious effects on societies, and private persons; from the testimony of the world in general, when others than themselves are concerned, and from the testimony of every man's conscience, in his own case. Who is there, that does not often feel in himself a powerful tendency to what he cannot but in his heart condemn? Is not his conscience God's vicegerent! and doth not natural religion, as well as the religion of Christ, declare him corrupt? So that I may say with the Apostle Paul, not citing the passage as a proof, but as an illustration and description of the character and state of natural men—*For when the Gentiles which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law: these having*

not the law, are a law unto themselves, which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts, the mean while, accusing or else excusing one another.

Thus there is as much light remaining with us since the fall, as to shew, that we are out of the way, but not to bring us back to it again.

As a serious consideration of the state of the wicked may shew us our natural impurity, so it hath been long ago discovered, and confessed by many of the ancient Heathens, who never heard of the name of Christ, nor knew of the remedy. These, discerning by nature the perfectly pure and holy nature of God, and comparing it with the dispositions prevalent in man, could not reconcile them together; but concluded, that a creature so corrupt could not come in that condition out of the hands of its Creator. This difficulty some of them endeavoured to solve by a state of pre-existence, which bears some resemblance to the true solution given of it in the holy scripture, *viz.* the apostacy of our first parents, which entailed a corrupted nature upon their posterity, in which the light of nature and revealed truth seem almost wholly to coincide.

It is to the same thing that I cannot help attributing the practice that so universally prevailed over the Heathen world, before the coming of Christ, *of offering sacrifices*, to appease the wrath of the deity supposed to be offended. That the custom of sacrificing prevailed very generally, perhaps universally among the Heathen nations, at the greatest distance from, and having no correspondence with each other, is a certain and unquestionable fact. Neither do I see to what cause we can ascribe it, unless to one of these two; either an ancient tradition from the beginning of the world, and spread with the inhabitants through

through the several parts of it, as they separated and peopled it, or to the common condition of human nature, which dictated the same thing to persons in such distant places.

If the first of these suppositions is embraced, which indeed I suppose to be the truth, it appears, that sacrifices were appointed by God to man in his fallen state, for the pardon of sin, and that they had reference to the great propitiatory sacrifice of Christ upon the cross.

If we prefer the last supposition, it would seem as if the consciousness of guilt had uniformly prompted men in all ages and nations to offer up some atonement for their offences. In both cases, it equally serves to prove the corruption and sinfulness of human nature.

Now, as what hath been said plainly proves the impurity of man in his natural state, so his misery and liableness to punishment may also be proved, both as a natural consequence of his sinfulness, and even more plainly by itself. There is not only a considerable degree of actual misery in the world, but plain presages of more to follow it in the world to come. Need I take up much time in enumerating the several miseries and calamities incident to human life? Are not oppression and injury from one another, poverty, sickness, pain and death, the plain fruits of sin, and visible tokens of God's displeasure? Man, with some marks of superiority and excellence of nature, is even, by means of his superiority, his knowledge, and foresight of his own sufferings, more miserable than any other of the creatures that is equally subject to the stroke of death.

To the whole, I shall only subjoin one consideration more, which is applicable to both parts of the argument—I have often thought, that the *natural terror and fear with which men are possessed, of the presence of God, or any*

any remarkable token of his power, is nothing else but an indication of guilt, or an apprehension of wrath.

You may see some incidents in scripture, from which it is natural to conclude, that when God makes any visible manifestation of his glory, or sends any of his angels or ministers from heaven to earth, those who are present are filled with the utmost dread and terror.

Thus, in the relation given of God's appearance upon Mount Sinai, it is said, *And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake.* See another example in Isaiah :—*Then said I, Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts.* And in the New Testament, in the Apostle John,—*And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead.*

And is not this always the case, in all ages, that upon any remarkable appearance of an inhabitant of the other world, or even when any such thing is falsely apprehended, the inhabitants of this world are filled with extraordinary terror? What is this do you imagine, but consciousness of guilt, and apprehension of vengeance?

Innocence has no enemy, and it has nothing to fear. We are all in much the same case with Adam, immediately after his first transgression; when he heard God's voice in the garden, *he was afraid, and fled, and hid himself.*—We read of no such fear possessing him while he retained his innocence; but as soon as he had sinned, he began to dread an avenging God.

From all this, then, I would conclude, that reason accords with scripture, in saying, that *all have sinned and come short of the glory of God*: that man in a natural state is *wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.*

S E R M O N I I I .

AN INDUCEMENT TO COME TO CHRIST.

BY

JOHN WITHERSPOON, D. D. LL. D.

COL. N. C. P.

REV. iii. 17.

Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.

HAVING, in a former discourse, proved and illustrated this truth, that all mankind are by nature in a state of sin and misery, under the bondage of corruption, and liable to the wrath of God:—I proceed now to the *second thing* proposed, which was to shew you, that being brought to a lively sense and genuine conviction of this, is the first, and a necessary step to the saving knowledge of God in Christ.

On this I shall not need to spend much time, as it is so exceedingly plain, both in itself, and from what hath been already said.—It is, however, necessary to set it clearly before you, in order to lay a foundation for the improvement of the subject.

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If the doctrine of Christ, and of him crucified, proceeds upon the supposition of our sinful and miserable condition by nature, then surely it can neither be valued, embraced, nor improved; and indeed, I think hardly understood by those who know not this their natural state. What Christ hath done, and promises to do in our behalf, is designed as a remedy for our distressed condition; and therefore, till the distress is known, the remedy will be set at nought. If a physician should offer his care and skill for the recovery of a man, who esteemed himself in perfect health, would he not deride the proposal, so long as he continued in that opinion? If any man should offer a charitable supply of clothes and food to one, who imagined himself immensely rich, and gloried in his riches, would he not look upon it as the grossest insult?

Just so is the Gospel treated by all such as see not their misery. What is the substance of the Gospel? "To you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men. Behold! I preach to you Christ crucified, a Saviour, suited to your necessities, able to save to the uttermost, all that come to God through him. He is well fitted to be a Mediator between you and your offended Maker. He hath offered himself up, a sacrifice to the justice of God, for your sins, by the merit of which, you may be saved from deserved and impending ruin. He offers himself as a guide, to direct your feet in the way of peace—to stand by you in the difficulties and dangers to which you are exposed, and to give you, by his communicated strength, a complete victory over all your enemies."

What reply doth the unconvinced sinner make to all this? Why he saith, "I know nothing of this misery you suppose, wherefore then a Saviour? I see no sin, what necessity then for an atonement? I fear no wrath, therefore will seek for no intercessor. My eyes are open, therefore

therefore I will have no guide. I know of no enemies, and therefore will not enter into contention with a shadow, or flee when no man pursueth."

These, my brethren, are either directly or implicitly the thoughts of men, in a secure and unconvinced state; and while they are so, they can see no form nor comeliness in the Saviour, nor any beauty that they should desire him.

It is otherwise with the broken in spirit. He sees his own vileness and unworthiness, and therefore cannot lift his eyes to God, but through the atoning blood of Christ. He fears the *avenger of blood*, and therefore flies to the *city of refuge*—The message of the Gospel is to him indeed glad tidings of great joy, and he counts it a faithful saying, and *worthy of all acceptance*.

The justice of this representation you may see from what our Saviour himself says, of the end of his coming: *They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick: But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice; for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*

See also the terms of his invitation. *Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

Appetite and knowledge of necessity is first required, or supposed to the bestowing of gospel blessings. *Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters.*

I shall only add, that we find by the instances recorded in scripture, of such as were converted by the preaching of the Gospel, that their conversion took its rise from conviction of sin.—*Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their hearts, and said unto Peter, and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? See also the instance of the jailor—Then he called for a light,*
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and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas: And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?

Repentance unto life, and the return of the sinner to God, proceeds from the same cause in every age. Who are the persons who believably apply to Christ for the pardon of their sins, but those who see they are undone without him? Who are the persons in whose eyes he is most precious, and who maintain the most habitual dependence upon him? Are they not those who have been most effectually humbled, and see their own insufficiency for any thing that is good?

From all this I conclude, that none can come to Christ by faith, but those who see themselves to be *wretched, and miserable, and blind, and naked.*

Let us now make some improvement of what hath been said upon this subject for your instruction and direction.

1. I would improve what has been said on this subject, for discovering the danger of many among us who have never yet been brought to a just sense of their character and state. Even the general belief that such often have in the scriptures may shew them what they have to fear. I might no doubt first of all observe, how very guilty and miserable those are, who are most notorious for sins of the grossest and most shameful kind. But my subject leads me more directly to consider who are in general *unrenewed*, than to mark the several degrees of guilt in particular sinners. From the text, therefore, and the illustration of it, I am authorised to declare to you, and *I beseech you to hear it with application*, that all such as were never brought to a real discovery and inward sense of their miserable condition by nature, are still in a state of wrath, and strangers to the power of religion, what-
ever

ever may be their profession, and whatever may be their present peace. Oh! how easy is it to lay asleep a natural conscience, and to keep a deceitful corrupt heart in a state of ease and security? Some formality in outward duty, some moderation in sin, so to speak, the natural decay and weakness of human passions or youthful lusts, in a character formed by human prudence, and regulated by health, credit or gain, is often made to supply the place of a heart renewed by the Spirit and grace of God. But consider, I beseech you, that though some may be tenfold more the children of the devil than others, yet all by nature are the servants of sin; and *except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*—It is not only such as are prophane or unclean; such as riot in brutish sensibility; such as are the plagues of human society; who live in brawls and contention, but all in whom an essential change has never been wrought, that are thus *concluded* under condemnation.

It is usual for men to take encouragement, from seeing others worse than themselves; and to consider all the threatenings in scripture, as levelled against the chief and capital offenders; but my text is chiefly directed to such as say they are *rich, and increased with goods*. Can you say then, my brethren, that you have been brought under genuine convictions of sin? Have you been obliged to fall down prostrate before God, when sitting upon the throne of his holiness? Have you found the sentence of death in yourselves, and discovered no remedy but in Christ? If this has never been your case, you have reason to fear, that you are yet *in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity*.

But I must tell you also, that this is matter of feeling, more than of profession. It is not enough to speak honourably of Christ or of his works. Many do so, who
never

never felt their necessity, or seriously and in good earnest applied to him. It were a happy thing, if all among our hearers, who call for evangelical preaching, who quarrel with us when they think we do not preach the Saviour's cross, the lost state of man, and the doctrine of free grace, were experimentally acquainted with these truths. Many such have only been accustomed to hear the Redeemer spoken of with reverence. They may be able to imitate the language of some of his servants, though they know very little of that brokenness of spirit which accompanies true repentance.

But lest this should be in any measure mistaken, I must make these two observations:—The *first* is, that a lively sense, and deep conviction of sin, is, properly speaking, but a negative mark of true Religion; giving us to know, that the unhumiliated are yet impenitent.—For it is certain, that many have been under very strong convictions, nay, have been driven to the very borders of despair with terror, who yet never were effectually changed, but stifled their convictions, and returned to their former security of heart, and carelessness of life.

Secondly, There may be some, on the other hand, who are truly *born of God*, in whom, the terrors of conviction have not been very remarkable. This happens most frequently in the case of those, who are called in their infancy, or earlier years, and who have had the advantage of a careful and pious education. It would be destructive of the comforts of God's children, to lay down *one method* in which he always proceeds. He is free and sovereign in the manner of his dealing with sinners; and softens some hearts by kindness, as well as others by correction. So that if the end be brought about, we need be less solicitous about the steps of his procedure. Yet I think humility of spirit is inseparable from real Religion; and

and if it be less visible in the anguish of repentance, it will be still manifest in the temper of the penitent.

II. Let me now, for the improvement of this subject, lay down a few of the best and most solid evidences of genuine conviction of sin. And,

1. It is a good sign that conviction is genuine, when there is a clear and deep apprehension of the *evil* of sin, as well as the *danger* of it. When the mind dwells, not only on the atrocity of particular crimes, but on the aggravation of all sin, as such: When the sinner is truly offended with himself, for departing from his Maker's service; breaking his holy laws; forgetting or despising his innumerable mercies: There may be, and there is often an apprehension of suffering, when there is little sense of the evil of sin; but the conviction is then genuine, when it makes the sinner not only remember what he has done, *but confess what he has deserved.*

2. It is a good evidence, when the sense of the evil of sin abides and grows, even though the fear of wrath may in a great measure have abated.

It is observable, that conviction of sin usually takes its rise from some gross or heinous acts, which first alarm the conscience; and in such a situation, the attention of the penitent is fixed on nothing else, but the enormities of his life. If this view continues, and produces its effects, he is soon brought to see and confess the inherent vanity of his heart; the worldliness of his affections; and the unprofitableness of his conversation. It is a very common thing, for persons who seem to have some sense of the commission of crimes, to have little or no sense at all of the neglect of duty, and of living daily to themselves. It was a heavy charge, however, brought by the Prophet against Belshazzar:—*And the God in whose band thy*

breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified. Wherever there is true repentance, though there may be the greatest peace of mind, there will be also a deep and growing sense of the evil of sin, and the obligation of being habitually devoted to God.

3. It is a good evidence, when there is a continued and growing esteem of the necessity and value of the mediation of Christ.—It was to save sinners that he came. A sense of sin is necessary to our receiving him; and in proportion to its strength, will certainly be our attachment to him. This indeed is the great and vital principle of the spiritual life.—*I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God; who loved me, and gave himself to die for me.*

4. The best and surest mark of real conviction of sin, is, if it leaves you possessed of a deep hatred and abhorrence of it, and a daily solicitude to fly from it. Some may counterfeit a sense of the evil of sin, to their own hearts; may have a real fear of its bitter consequences; and even a presumptuous reliance on Christ for pardon; and yet may in some instances adhere to the practice of it.

Floods of tears from such a person avail nothing; but he hath certainly truly sorrowed for sin, who in his practice forsakes it:—that is to say, he is not willingly subject to any known sin,—but says with Elihu, *That which I see not teach thou me: If I have done iniquity, I will do no more.*

III. Let me beseech all serious persons to improve this subject for the trial of their state. Examine, by the principles above laid down, the reality and the progress of religion in your souls. Have you a growing sense of the

the evil of sin, and of your own unworthiness?—This is at once an evidence, and a mean of growth in grace. He that thinks least of himself, is highest in God's account; and the more a believer increases in holiness and real worth, the more he increases in humility. As it is an evidence, it is also a mean of further improvement; for he that hath the deepest sense of his unworthiness and weakness, will certainly live most by faith, in the merit and grace of his Redeemer.

Therefore, Christians, try yourselves by this important sign: Whether do you, by religious duties, build yourselves up on self-righteousness, or do you only learn by them, how far you fall short of what is incumbent on you? What innumerable evils compass you about; and therefore, how much have you need of mercy instead of reward? Do you look upon the works of righteousness which you have done, as something, by which you *merit* at the hand of God; or do you look upon them as the *evidence* of his own work in you, and for you, and give him the glory, to whom it is due?

IV. I shall now conclude the whole, with a few directions for producing and preserving this profitable sense and conviction of sin. And,

1. Let me beg of every hearer the serious consideration of himself and his ways. Many have no sense of their sinfulness, because they have no knowledge of themselves at all; but go through the world, in uninterrupted thoughtlessness and unconcern. Is there any thing of greater moment than the state of your minds, and your hope towards God? Inattention is perhaps a more universal cause of impiety, than high-handed and obstinate profanity. Would you but seriously consider your ways, and lay to heart the things that belong to your peace, I

would count it a hopeful circumstance; and expect you would speedily see your danger, and God in his mercy would lead you to the cure.

2. Give yourselves much to reading and hearing the word of God. The entrance of his word giveth light.—It is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, and correction; but it is particularly necessary for *conviction*; for by the law is the knowledge of sin. What wonder, if those who never open a Bible, and seldom enter into the house of God, should be ignorant of their guilt and misery? The word of God shews his right in you, pleads his cause, and challenges your apostacy. It is exceedingly rare that those who have fairly turned their backs upon God's instituted worship, are disturbed in their security; but are suffered to sleep on, till they sleep the sleep of death. But it frequently happens, that those who attend ordinances, even from no higher principle than curiosity, custom or form, find, that the word of God is *a fire and hammer* that breaketh the rock in pieces; *that it is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing, even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*

3. In the last place, Let me beseech you often to seat yourselves in the immediate presence of God, or rather, frequently to recollect, that you can no where go from his Spirit, or fly from his presence. There is, if I may speak so, a light and glory in the presence of God, that discerns and and discloses the works of darkness. We may often excuse or palliate our conduct to men, and even hide its deformity from our own view, when we could not justify it to ourselves, if we reflected, that *it is open and manifest in the sight of God.*—If, therefore, there is any thing in your practice, which you are inclined to palliate

palliate and apt to excuse,—suppose you were standing at the judgment-seat of Christ, where all of us shall shortly be; and think, whether your excuses will then stand the test of his impartial search.

If our hearts condemn us not, God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things. It is therefore the duty and interest of every sinner, to take shame and confusion of face to himself, and apply to the *blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel.*

S E R M O N I V.

THE SALVATION OF SINNERS, ONLY BY THE BLOOD OF JESUS.

BY

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I COR. V. 7.

For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us.

THERE is in this passage a direct allusion to the Jewish feast or sacrament called the passover, and to the method of observing it enjoined by God at its original institution. The institution itself, with the occasion and manner of observing it, are particularly recorded in

Exodus. The whole œconomy of Providence towards the Jewish nation, especially from the time they first came into Egypt, until their settlement in the land of Canaan, is typical. Their Egyptian bondage was perhaps intended by God to shadow forth the natural state of man with respect to spiritual things, and their miraculous deliverance by the hand of Moses, clearly pointed to the recovery of fallen sinners by Jesus Christ. There is no conduct of Providence, wherein the wisdom of God shines with more glory and evidence than in the exactness in which the spirit of the New Testament answers to the letter of the Old, the shadows to the substance, the figures to the things prefigured, and the types to the antitypes. He, who will humbly and carefully compare them, will not fail of obtaining great conviction and information with regard to the divinity of the scriptures, and entire satisfaction with respect to most of those points, about which the Christian world are so much divided. The Old and New Testaments do mutually illustrate each other. The Old would not be equally clear without the New, the New in many parts would be dark and unintelligible without the Old. Our text is an instance of the truth of this remark.

What should we be able to make of this New Testament doctrine, *that Christ is our passover*, were it not for the light and assistance we have from the Old Testament? —But from both we easily learn, that the passover was a type of Jesus Christ; it was intended by God to be of this nature and use. The paschal lamb had a direct reference to Jesus as the lamb of God. It was observed by true believers under the Old Testament in this view: their faith beheld Christ in the institution. The epistle to the Hebrews tells us, that *by faith Moses kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood.*

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The most easy method, therefore, of explaining the truth contained in the text, will be by contrasting the type and the antitype. We shall best understand what we are taught when Christ is called *our passover*, by attending to the original institution of this ordinance among the Jews; and pointing out the resemblance it bears to *Jesus Christ the Mediator*. This I shall endeavour to do in the following particulars.

I. The passover was appointed when God was about to destroy all the first-born in the land of Egypt. They were all doomed to destruction by the divine decree, without exception. Moses declares to Pharaoh: *Thus saith the Lord, About midnight I will go out into the midst of Egypt, and all the first-born in the land of Egypt shall die, from the first-born of Pharaoh that sitteth on the throne, even to the first-born of the maid-servant that is behind the mill, and all the first-born of beasts.*

On this awful occasion was the passover instituted by God, and appointed to the Israelites.

In like manner Jesus Christ was appointed, when all the human race were, by the sentence of the divine law, doomed to everlasting destruction *from the presence of the Lord and glory of his power*. Eternal death was fixed as the demerit and punishment of man's violating that law under which God had placed him. *In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.*

The head of the human race, with whom God transacted for himself and all his posterity, violated the constitution established with him, and ruined himself; and the whole race was ruined in and with him. They all sinned and became guilty in their head and representative. *By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.*

On this occasion, the whole race of mankind, through all their generations, were doomed, by the sentence of God's righteous law, to *everlasting perdition*. The sentence was righteous, the doom was just, and it would have been infinitely fit in God to have executed the same. If this had been done, each of us who are here present, would have been now in chains of eternal darkness and despair. That this would be the event of man's apostasy, was no doubt expected by all the elect angels. They had seen the issue of rebellion in the case of their fallen companions; and if they could argue only from fact, no other conclusion could be made by them, than *the damnation of mankind*.

In this lost and ruined condition of mankind, when they were all under the curse and exposed to everlasting destruction, Jesus Christ became, in the appointment of God, *our passover*. God constituted Adam our first covenant head, and he constituted Christ our second covenant head. Adam's headship was an image or type of Christ's. In regard to this appointment, Christ is called *the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*.

II. The passover was originally appointed as the *only* method for the Israelites escaping the destruction God intended to execute on the Egyptians. The account of the institution renders the observation evident; for when God had ordained the solemnity, and the manner of observing it, he gives the following reason of the ordinance:—*For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt, I will execute judgment: I am the Lord. And the blood shall be to you for a token on the houses where you are, and when I see the*

the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt.

This destruction of the Egyptians was figurative; the method appointed to the Israelites for escaping this destruction, was also figurative. The former respected the effect of God's wrath for sin in the eternal damnation of sinners; the latter, the only way of deliverance from this misery. Accordingly Jesus Christ is our passover, as by him *only* can we escape the wrath and curse of God, due to us for sin.—He is ordained of God for this purpose. He is the wisdom and power of God to salvation to every one that believeth. There is no name but Christ's by which sinners can be saved. There is no possibility of escaping the wrath of God, but by him. In vain is salvation hoped or sought for in other ways; from the hills and from the mountains, from this or from that course; for Jesus Christ is the *true and only passover*. Vain are the attempts of guilty affrighted mortals, to avert the impending vengeance. All the various inventions and practices of a mind distracted with the guilt of sin and dread of hell, are but as stubble before the devouring flame. And he who has never felt this truth, has never yet *fled to the only ark of safety* from divine vengeance. *The wrath of God abideth on him, and his jealousy will smoke against that man.* And unless the eyes of such a sinner be soon opened to see himself, and God, and Christ, in a manner that he never has, in a manner that shall *shake down all his present hopes and confidences to the foundation*, the storms of God's unquenchable fury will quickly do it. *The hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters overflow the biding place.* Hear this, ye that forget God; hear this, ye that compass yourselves about with *sparks of your own kindling*; ye shall have this at God's hands; *ye shall lie down in sorrow!* Let no sinner *bless himself*

in his heart when he heareth the words of this curse; saying, *I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart.* Let no sinner behave himself proudly. God hath said it, and he will perform. Were it the threatening of a man or angel, you might defy his menaces; but the Lion of the tribe of Judah *hath roared, who will not fear?*—*The Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophecy?*

† III. The Israelites were as liable to the threatened destruction as the Egyptians, as to any thing in themselves or belonging to them, which distinguished them, as a ground of pre-eminence, or reason of exemption from the common ruin. This remark is obvious from the account of the paschal institution. The nature of the passover supposeth the truth of this observation, that there was nothing in the Jew, *considered in himself*, to distinguish him from the Egyptian. The one was no more worthy of favour than the other. The Israelites, considered in themselves, as much merited destruction as the Egyptians. There was nothing marked out the one for favour more than the other; but the sovereign God made the difference, and appointed the sign of distinction. Thus it is in the case of every sinner saved by Jesus Christ. He sees nothing in himself from first to last, to distinguish or recommend him to the favour of God, above the vilest monster that walks the earth. This is the sincere and undissembled language of his heart through the whole course of his life, after he has become acquainted with the truth: *Why me, Lord?*—Why was I taken and another left? Why was I distinguished from the most tormented wretch that is now in hell? Why was God's grace bestowed on me? Why have I a part in Christ granted me, while so many others, who I am sure, are not worse in themselves than I am,

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if so bad, are suffered to perish in rejecting him? He can find no manner of reason for this distinction, but, *Even so Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.—Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay, but by the law of faith.*

Did not the sovereign God make the difference between the first-born of Israel, and the first-born of Pharaoh? Was not sovereign mercy greatly displayed in saving the one, while the other was slain, when both in themselves were equally liable to destruction? So sovereign grace through Jesus Christ shines with infinite lustre, in saving some sinners from eternal misery, while others are left to perish in their iniquities, who by nature were not worse than they. And thus the saint, from his conversion to the day of his death, has continual conviction, that the whole of his salvation is owing to the *most free favour and unmerited grace.* X

IV. The killing of the paschal lamb was not sufficient to save them from the stroke of the destroying angel, unless the posts and lintels of the doors were sprinkled with its blood. This was of essential consequence. This was the great thing to be done after killing the lamb, in order to have any benefit from the institution. The whole transaction was useless in neglect of this circumstance. If the blood was not thus sprinkled, they were equally exposed to ruin, as if no part of the institution had been complied with. Though they had killed the passover, had eaten of it, and observed the instituted feast, yet all would be of no avail to save them from the destroyer, *if the blood was not sprinkled on the doors.* Thus it is with respect to Jesus Christ the true passover. He has been slain as the Lamb of God *who taketh away the sins of the world.*—His blood has been shed. He poured out his soul

soul unto death. He offered himself a sacrifice, an offering of sweet-smelling savour unto God, and by his own blood hath entered into the holiest of all. But this will be of no avail to us *if we are not sprinkled with it*. Without this, the death of Christ will have no salutary effect with regard to us. The case will be eventually the same to us as if Christ had never died. Christ will profit us nothing. His death will not save *us* from death.

Let it therefore be solemnly attended to, that the shedding of Christ's blood will be of no avail to your salvation, unless you be sprinkled with it. This is the true blood of sprinkling that can divert the stroke of justice, that can purge the conscience from dead works, and from the guilt of sin, *when the overflowing scourge shall pass through*. The sprinkling of the blood of Jesus is the only defence against the wrath of God. Happy the soul who, when God shall rise to judgment, will be found sprinkled with this blood, which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel. But *indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish*, to every one that is then found unsprinkled with the blood of Jesus.

How it stands with you, my hearers, in regard to this matter, becomes you earnestly to enquire. It is of more importance to you than all the other affairs of life besides. And yet, perhaps, there is not a few in this assembly, who never made it any part of your care in all your lives, and to this moment are entirely careless about it. Alas! what hath bewitched you, that you should not flee from the wrath to come? What will you do when God shall whet his glittering sword, and his hand shall take hold on vengeance? If you are never sprinkled with the blood of Jesus, the justice of God will avenge itself in *your blood*.

V. It was not the act of the Israelites in sprinkling the blood of the lamb on the posts and lintels of their doors, that God had respect to, when he passed them over while he destroyed the Egyptians. It was not, I say, their act or obedience that God looked at, and on account of which he spared them; but it was the *blood itself* to which he had respect, and on account of which he passed them by. —The blood seen on the posts of their doors was the thing which secured them from destruction, and to which God had an *exclusive respect*, when he went through the land destroying all the first-born of the Egyptians, and passing over the Israelites.

Thus is the matter represented in the above cited chapter. *And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where you are, and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt.* And again:—*When the Lord seeth the blood on the lintel and on the two side-posts, the Lord will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in to smite you.*—Hence you see the blood is the only thing to which God had respect in sparing them from destruction.

Thus exactly stands the case with respect to Jesus Christ the true passover. This blood of the paschal lamb represented the blood of Christ, and the sprinkling thereof prefigured the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus. What God had respect to in the figure, when he passed by the Israelites, to that he has respect in the substance, when he passeth by guilty sinners, and saves them from deserved destruction for ever. These things teach us directly what God has respect to when he pardons penitent sinners, and bestows salvation upon them. It is not to any thing in them he has regard, as the reason of his acquitting them from condemnation. It is not for their obedience, their
faith,

faith, or any thing in them whatever, but *entirely and exclusively* for the sake of the blood of Christ. It is this alone God has respect to, in justifying those that believe. The case is here as it was with the Israelites; it was the blood of the lamb sprinkled on the doors of the latter, to which God solely had respect and spared them: It is to the blood of Christ God *entirely* has respect, in the justification of the former.

This likewise teaches us to what *we* are to have respect as the only ground of our acceptance with God; for we must have regard to the same thing in *expecting justification*, which God has in granting it. We must have respect to Christ's merit and righteousness *exclusively*, not to *our* obedience, *our* faith, repentance, or any thing else, as the pleadable matter of our acceptance, or the reason and ground of our pardon.

I am particular here, my brethren, because I know *your life is in it*. If you mistake the ground of acceptance with God, you are ruined. If you place your obedience, or any acts or works of your own, in the room of Christ's righteousness, you must perish. *Those who go about to establish their own righteousness, submit not to the righteousness of God; and those who submit not to the righteousness of God in the gospel, must perish forever.* It is to the righteousness of the gospel God has respect in justifying believing sinners; and it is to this *you* have respect *entirely*, if you are true believers; for it is the nature of evangelical faith to look to Christ's righteousness *only*.

A persuasion that this is the only thing that can commend a sinner to God, accounting all things else but dross and dung with regard to this matter, are inseparable concomitants of true faith; or, I may say, belong to the very nature of it.

VI. All were saved from destruction, on whose doors the blood of the lamb was sprinkled, while the plague swept off the Egyptians all around them.

While the first-born of the Egyptians were slain by thousands, the Israelites were safe, and no harm happened to them—the wrath of God, *the pestilence that walketh in darkness*, came not nigh them.

Thus shall all those be saved from destruction, who are sprinkled with the blood of Jesus, the true passover. There is now no wrath abiding on them, nor any vengeance in reserve. When God seeth this blood on them, he will pass over them. He will spare them as a man spareth his own son. This blood will never loose its efficacy nor power with God. It is of a *sweet smelling savour* to him. This is the apostolic language to express its acceptableness to God. Great is the delight which the Lord God Almighty takes in receiving those to favour who are sprinkled with this blood.

I must not enter further into this subject at present. Many striking instances of resemblance between the typical and true passover yet remain; but lest I should be tedious, I must omit them at this time, and conclude with some improvement.

I. How illustrious the wisdom, and how distinguishing the grace and love of God in our salvation! Behold what infinite love, *that God should so love the world, as to give his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him might not perish, but have everlasting life*: that God should send his own Son into the world, that we might not perish who believe on him; that God's eternal Son should be made a servant, that we might be made the sons of God; that he should be made sin that we might be made righteous; that he should die, that we might live;

live; that he should suffer the curse of the law and the punishment of sin, that we might be delivered from the curse, and redeemed from punishment; that his blood should be shed, that by the sprinkling of it we might be delivered from eternal destruction; that he should be our passover, and that the vengeance should light on him that was due to us, are indeed mysteries of grace and arguments of love, which pass all understanding. They ought never to be thought of by us, but with rapture and astonishment. When we consider who it was that condescended thus; not an angel, but the Lord of angels; not some exalted creature, lifted up in excellency and dignity far above us, but the Creator, *God over all, blessed for ever*; who but is lost in sweet surprise and humble adoration!

This grace of God is so inconceivably great, that the saints, during their abodes in these tabernacles, cannot bear any great view of it. It would dissolve their frame; it exceeds our utmost thoughts.

When we consider for whom Christ suffered and died; for creatures, mean and insignificant creatures; for rebellious creatures, incapable of ever being profitable to him; in the eternal rejection of whom, his justice would have shone with a conspicuous ray, and been admired by all the choirs above:

Well may we break out in the language of astonishment, overborn with the grace of God, *What manner of love is this!*—Well hath God said, *My ways are not like your ways, nor my thoughts as your thoughts.*

Who is not by such a display convinced, that the Gospel is not a *cunningly devised fable*; but an amazing and glorious display of the nature and perfections of God? How wonderful, how godlike is the work of redemption! It seems to exceed the works of creation, although these

shew forth the Divine power and Godhead, even as the light of the sun exceeds that of a faint and languid star.

II. As we are here taught, that unless we are sprinkled with the blood of Jesus, his death and atonement will finally be of no avail to us ; we ought to enquire, my brethren, with all diligence, whether we are sprinkled with this blood, yea or nay? This is the *only blood* that speaketh better things than the blood of Abel. If you are not sprinkled with it, and die thus, better you had never been born. Oh! therefore, look into this matter. As you value your own salvation, enquire into it. As you would not be forever rejected of God, see to it, that the blood of Christ *be upon you*.—You have an example before you of the certain consequence of being without this blood sprinkled on you, in the destruction of the Egyptians. *They are ensamples unto us*. Wherefore, my dear hearers, look into your own hearts and lives to-day, and let the single enquiry which you make at your own consciences be thus with each one: “Am I sprinkled with the blood of Jesus or not? Have I ever been effectually convinced of my lost and undone estate by nature and practice? Have I ever seen the exceeding great evil and desert of sin? Has sin ever been imbittered to my soul, so that I have been pricked at my heart, and made to cry out, *What shall I do to be saved?*”

Have you, my audience, ever seen that it would be just in God to cast you off forever, and have your hearts sunk and fainted under the view? Have you felt yourselves without strength to make atonement for your crimes? And have you been filled with unfeigned sorrow and grief, that you have sinned against God and broken his law?—And have you, with your whole hearts, under these views, renounced all your *own righteousness* as filthy

rags; and rested your guilty souls, naked and wretched as they are, upon a *crucified Jesus*? Do you see the value, the infinite value of his blood, to make atonement for your sins? Is Christ, his righteousness, and the way of salvation through him, what ravishes, charms and rejoices your souls? And are you depending on him continually, for all needed grace and strength, to enable you to discharge the duties which you owe to God and your neighbour?—Oh! my brethren, *examine yourselves, try your own selves.*

Those of you who have scriptural evidences to hope that you are sprinkled with the blood of Jesus, how blessed are you! How happy is the condition of true believers! God will certainly pass over you when he arises to judgment. He has given you full assurance of this already, in the *figure*, and he will soon do it in *reality*. Let not your hearts be troubled, O Christians, the destroying angel shall not come nigh you! Believe in God, he abideth faithful, and that you might have the strongest consolation, he hath added his oath to his promise. *God willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise, the immutability of his council, confirmed it by an oath; that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation who have fled for refuge, to lay hold on the hope set before us.*

Perhaps your own vileness and wretchedness affright you; you see so little to distinguish you as objects of favour; so much to render you objects of wrath, that you cannot think you have any part in the blessedness here spoken of. But remember, that what makes you acceptable is the blood of sprinkling.—Christ is made of God unto you *wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.* This is the grace wherein you stand, and wherein you are accepted.

But

But those who never felt the powerful influence of this method of salvation, may object, that this doctrine leads to licentiousness. Nay, my brethren, no doctrine has a stronger operation the contrary way. No doctrine has a more powerful effect to purify the heart, to animate to diligence in good works, than salvation by free grace, than acceptance before God, *solely* by the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus. The real belief of this doctrine is the only abiding spring of holy obedience.—Saith not the apostle, *The love of Christ constraineth us.*

O Christians! be persuaded to maintain a powerful sense of Gospel grace; and that it is only by the blood of sprinkling you are distinguished as objects of Divine acceptance. This is the surest road to peace and comfort. And by this blood you shall enter into the holiest of all; the everlasting doors of glory will be opened to you, and you shall be introduced into eternal felicity, by this Jesus with whose blood you are sprinkled, saying, *Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*—But are there not some in this assembly who have full convictions of judgment, that you have never been sprinkled with this *peace-speaking and life-giving blood*?—Who have never fled to Jesus for refuge from the storms of Divine vengeance? Who have not the door-posts of your hearts sprinkled? Be assured, O sinners! that the destroying angel will enter into your souls and smite you, and leave you neither root nor branch. You shall be swept away by the torrent of Divine wrath, if you thus continue when God shall descend to judgment. Nothing can secure you from the utmost destruction, if you continue to undervalue so great a sacrifice as the Lamb of God. *Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God,*

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God,

God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and done despite to the Spirit of grace? It is dreadful, O sinners! to have this sacrifice smoking against you, and the blood of Christ calling for vengeance, instead of mercy, upon your devoted heads. O, be warned to flee from the wrath to come! for when the midnight cry of Egypt arrives, it will then be too late! Wherefore, now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation. O sinners! lay hold on the blood of sprinkling. Hearken to the invitations of Christ Jesus. Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and whosoever will, let him come, and partake of the waters of life freely.—The Spirit and the bride say, Come; and that we may all come and be sprinkled with this soul-saving blood, may God of his infinite mercy grant, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen, and Amen.

S E R.

S E R M O N V.

THE INFLUENCES OF GOD AS A SUN, THE
GREAT CONSOLATION OF HIS PEOPLE.

BY

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PSALMS lxxxiv. 11.

For the Lord God is a Sun.

THESE words stand here as a reason of the Psalmist's declaration in the preceding verse, *that one day spent in the house of God, that is, in an attendance on his ordinances, was better than a thousand*; that he would rather *hold the lowest place* in God's house, and thus enjoy the privileges of his public worship, than dwell in tents of wickedness, or enjoy the utmost pleasures of sin. The reason of this preference is resolved into this consideration, that *the Lord God is a Sun*.

This view of the words in their connection serves to shew us, wherein consists the true excellency and advantage of the instituted ordinances of Divine worship, and

the true reason of the high esteem all good men, without exception, have of them; their great respect and love to them; their care and diligence in attending them; *God is in them as a Sun.*

As the natural sun, by his influences, enlightens and revives every living thing, so God in his ordinances enlightens and revives the hearts of his people, shining into their minds, and giving them the light of the knowledge of his glory, in the person of Jesus Christ,—shedding abroad his love in their hearts, and granting them *that peace, which passeth all understanding.*

But if we consider the words in a more independent view, they teach us, that God is to good men, what the sun, by its influences, is to the natural world. Who is ignorant of the high importance of the natural sun? This heavenly luminary forms our day, disperses the gloomy horrors of the night, and sheds fertility, light, and joy, through every part of our system. Without it all nature would be one frozen mass; neither life, nor vegetation, nor fruitfulness would appear.

Now, when God is represented by the beautiful and striking image of a Sun, with regard to his influences and agency, towards those who walk uprightly, who can help perceiving how supreme and sensible a blessing his existence and communications are, in *their* experience and estimate?

As the natural sun is the fountain of light, sheds joy and gladness through the animal and vegetable kingdoms, and causes our earth to teem with all its rich variety of fruits, so the Sun of Righteousness, the true and eternal God is all this, and more than this, in his communications to his people. He communicates spiritual light to their minds,—infuses joy and gladness into their hearts,

hearts, and renders them fruitful in every branch of goodness,

I. God is a Sun, as he communicates *spiritual light* to his people.

There may be said to be three kinds of light,—*physical*,—*intellectual*,—and *spiritual*,—or, the light of this *world*,—the light of *reason*,—and the light of the *Spirit of God*. Each of these differs from the other in its nature. There is as real a difference between the intellectual and spiritual light, as there is between intellectual and physical, or the light of the sun. The former agree in many more respects than the latter; but there is no such agreement as renders them of the same nature and kind. This difference will farther appear in the sequel.

The natural condition of the human mind, since the fall of Adam, is a state of darkness and blindness. When man apostatised, he lost that spiritual sense, whereby he was capable of discerning spiritual objects. The image of God forsook his heart, and so no longer was he captivated with the beauties of holiness. The soul now remains in spiritual darkness, until the divine image or spiritual sense be restored, which is done by the operation of the Spirit of God in the work of regeneration. This teaches us the great propriety of those scripture-phrases, where natural men are represented, as *not discerning spiritual things*; as having their minds *darkened*; being *ignorant, blind, and dead*.—These expressions can, by no means, be understood to mean the want of intellectual light, or the light of reason; for were we to understand them in this respect, they really carry the matter so far as to signify, that the light of reason was not only impaired, but utterly lost and extinguished; wherefore this cannot be the scripture-sense. But if we understand them as ex-

pressions of the want of *spiritual light*, then they are perfectly true and proper. The whole world lieth in darkness: *Having the understanding darkened; being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their hearts.*

— Spiritual light is wholly extinguished by the fall; and hence is there so much darkness, ignorance and confusion, even in speculation, with regard to divine things. That the world is full of darkness respecting God, his perfections and kingdom, is a matter which cannot be denied; and this darkness must be occasioned, either by something in God, or by his concealment of himself, or by the loss of a spiritual understanding amongst men.—But this blindness doth not arise from any thing in God, as if he were darkness; *for God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all*: nor does it proceed from any concealment of himself, so that we cannot behold him by reason of it. This was never true in itself at any time, however great and palpable the darkness of mens minds have been with regard to God; but it is less true under the Gospel-dispensation than ever; for the true light now shineth, and God hath eminently manifested himself in the character and instructions of his Son, whom he hath revealed for this purpose, who was *the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person*; and whose glory so conspicuously shone forth to the view of those who were enlightened from above, that they knew him to be *the only begotten of the Father*.

Therefore, it remains, that this darkness must be occasioned by the loss of a spiritual understanding, through the wickedness of mens hearts: *For light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*

Now,

Now, of *all* sorts of light God is the author.—He formed the sun to rule the day,—he maketh us *wiser* than the fowls of heaven,—and he alone giveth *supernatural light, or a spiritual understanding*.—Hence is he styled the *Father of Light*, from whom cometh every good and perfect gift.

If any admit no other kind of light, with regard to divine things, but that of reason, *improved and beightened* by external advantages and diligent application, I shall not, at present, dispute the subject with them. It is not this sort of light that I mean, but something of a nature entirely different,—a light that is properly supernatural, and from God; in a manner, the light which reason furnishes is not, nor can, with any propriety, be said to be. God manifests himself to his people in a peculiar manner, by a lustre, as superior to that of mere natural reason, as it is different from it in kind. They have the same common knowledge of God as others,—the same powers of reason,—the same external advantages from his word and works, for acquiring a speculative acquaintance with him, his nature and perfections; but they have a knowledge of him which is not acquired in this way, which is far above the efforts of reason, though blessed with the best aids, and applied with the greatest diligence. This knowledge is the effect of a spiritual illumination of their minds, by God's shining into them with the light of his glory. The heart is the subject of the divine irradiation; the eyes of the understanding are enlightened by the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. When God thus shines into their hearts, the effect is a clear, distinct, lively perception of his supreme and transcendant excellency,—of the beauty and amiableness of his nature and perfections. God appears exceedingly lovely, and exceedingly glorious; worthy to be feared, and
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to be had in reverence of all intelligent creatures. The genuine language of their heart now is,—*Bless the Lord, O my soul!—who would not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name!—love the Lord, all ye his saints!—laud him all ye people!—praise ye him, all his Angels!—praise ye him, all his hosts!*

Not only does this or that perfection appear agreeable; or this or that branch of his conduct; but every thing in God is lovely; every perfection of his nature, and every branch of his providence;—every thing that belongs to him has a peculiar sweetness, and acceptableness in it to the soul. Especially the Gospel appears with peculiar lustre, as the brightest and most distinguishing display of the uncreated loveliness of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

Some persons talk of great regard to God, great esteem of his perfections, and high expectations of future happiness; while they have but a mean opinion of the Gospel, and are destitute of all sensible love and deference to the character of Jesus Christ. But all their religion is a deceit, and their hopes a delusion; for these things cannot be separated:—*He that hateth not the Son, hateth not the Father.—He that rejecteth the Son, rejecteth the Father.—He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father, which hath sent him.—He who receives not the record of God, maketh him a liar.*

In proportion to our sense of the excellency of God, and his perfections, will be our sense of the excellency of the Gospel, and its author, and so on the contrary.

When God at first regenerates a soul, and shines into the heart, and gives it to behold the light of the knowledge of his glory, the creature is introduced into a new world.—All things appear new. It has new views and perceptions of God and Jesus Christ, such as it never had before;

before ; yea, those things which were known before, appear with a new lustre and beauty.—The scripture and its truths appear new ; new light and glory appear to shine in them.—Now the heart has an evidence of their divinity, and a sense that they are not cunningly devised fables, far beyond any thing it could obtain from mere speculation.—In these discoveries, the mind is brought to the full assurance of understanding.

There is no knowledge which we can acquire, that can anticipate this divine illumination, or render it useless.—Some say, men may, by their own application, obtain all that knowledge in religion that is necessary ; and then all that remains to make them good mean, is to practise what they know. This is one of the modern refinements, and is as far from being true as some others : for that religious knowledge, which is necessary to form the heart and practise to real goodness, lies not at all in mere speculation ; neither will the result of our own application, in itself considered, ever sanctify the soul or produce a truly virtuous life. That knowledge which sanctifies, is of a different original ; it comes down from above ; it flows from the mercy-seat of God.

And as no acquired knowledge can supersede the necessity of this divine teaching, so when it is granted in any considerable degree, it is very perceptible. The most learned divine becomes immediately sensible of the vast difference between his *own knowledge* and this *divine instruction*. His own notions, however diligently collected and matured, are as nothing, with respect to clearness and efficacy, compared to one view of the divine glory communicated to the heart, by the Spirit of God shining into it. Now, he sees divine things in a different view ; he beholds them in a very different light ;
hence

hence this knowledge is altogether a different thing from the teachings of any outward means whatsoever.

In this sense, God is a sun, and in this manner, does he communicate spiritual light to his people.

II. God infuses *joy and gladness* into their hearts.

As God is the author of spiritual light, so also of spiritual joy. Holy light always precedes holy joy, as it is the reason and ground of it. That joy and affection which does not rise from a spiritual discovery of the excellency of divine things, is false and enthusiastic.—There is no such thing in true religion, as heat without light, or zeal without knowledge. There is indeed much of this sort of religion in the world; but as it has not the nature of true religion, it ought not to bear the name.

So, on the other hand, there is no such thing in real religion as spiritual light without heat, or spiritual knowledge without zeal. These can be no more separated than light from the sun, or heat from fire, or reason from an intelligent nature.

God does not give to all his creatures equal degrees of joy and consolation; but he usually grants them in some degree; and in those communications, he shews a wise and holy sovereignty. And where the least measure of this spiritual joy is given, it is of so exquisite and heavenly a nature, that the soul can never again thirst *supremely* for earthly joys, nor habitually prefer the delights and pleasures of earth to those of true religion. This is the distinguishing nature of spiritual joy, of which God is the author, that it forever palls the taste to all sensual and sinful pleasures.—This is the water which Christ gives, that he who drinks of it will never thirst again.

It is only the true and upright Christian, who knows the refined pleasures and joys which God pours into their hearts;

hearts; such as the men of this world understand not, neither do strangers intermeddle with them. These are the secrets of the Lord, which are imparted only to those who fear him. They are sacred pledges of mutual friendship,—foretastes or prelibations of those rivers of pleasure at the right hand of God, which are in reserve for his people, when they shall have finished their present pilgrimage. These joys, wherewith true Christians are entertained, are produced by the holy Spirit, through means of the word and ordinances.

God's own existence and glorious perfections *realised to their hearts*, form one *comprehensive reason* of sweetness and satisfaction. None but good men know what infinite pleasure it affords, *that God exists*. Oftentimes it fills their souls with unspeakable transports, and they inwardly exult in the *blessed assurance*.

The universal dominion and government of God, is another source of sensible pleasure to the truly pious. O! how comfortable is the thought, that *the Lord God omnipotent reigneth*!—that in the darkest state of things, *he sits at the helm*, and directs the affairs of the church, and of the world!—that his own glory will be advanced!

Sometimes these joys arise from having their hearts drawn out in strong and sensible love to God above all things; in a love stronger than death.—O! how transporting the pleasure, to feel an heart full of love to the most amiable of Beings!

Sometimes he gives them the kindest assurance of his favour and regard through Jesus Christ.—While they fear their unworthiness and sinfulness will for ever separate him from them, he secretly communicates some tender testimony of his love, and at once dissipates every distressing suspicion of heart. O! how sweet is it, to be prevented

prevented by the goodness of God, and to have a garment of praise for a spirit of heaviness!

Oftentimes he causes the humble and upright Christian to rejoice in the hopes of glory, and the shortness of that interval that bars him from his immediate and everlasting presence. God enables the contrite one to anticipate the joys of that blessed season, when he shall be admitted to see him as he is;—when sin shall be no more, and sorrow have an end;—when the imperfection and vanity of this present state shall no more obstruct the vigour of the soul, but his songs and praises to God and the Lamb be as ardent and sincere as those of saints and seraphims around the throne.

Thus, God is a sun, in communicating *joy and gladness* to the hearts of his people.

III. God, by his influences, renders true Christians fruitful in every branch of goodness.

It is the influence of the natural sun that makes the earth productive of fruits necessary for the life of man and beast: In like manner, it is the influence of the Sun of Righteousness that makes Christians fruitful in all good works. Their improvements in piety and virtue will always be in proportion to the degree and frequency of these influences.—Without them there is no progress to be made.—*Without me*, says our Lord, *ye can do nothing*. How much is the truth of this assertion the experience of every true Christian? If Christ does not animate him by the secret power of his grace, how dead the heart to every spiritual exercise!—How does grace languish, and things divine lose their sensible relish from day to day!—Just as you have seen things in early spring in the natural world, when the beams and influences of the sun are intercepted by thick clouds and frosty winds, the ver-

nal beautiful appearances fade—grafs, and herbs, and flowers decline and languish, till the clouds and cold are dispersed, and the sun resumes its splendour, and sheds abroad its genial warmth by its unrebated rays, then all nature flourishes again. Thus it is in the Christian life. When God lifts up the light of his countenance, every grace begins to spring, and the soul becomes gay and blooming as the garden of God. And now, there is much fruit to the glory of their heavenly Father. Praise and joy and holy walking employ every hour. But alas! when God hides his face, troubles again return. Sin and the world renew their attacks, and too often, former victories are disgraced by new defeats; but when the Sun of Righteousness shines upon them, grace grows, and every good work abounds,

I M P R O V E M E N T.

1. We here learn of what high consideration, the being, government and communications of God are to good men.—There is no supposition more terrible and distressing to a pious mind than this, *that there is no God.* No attempts made by Satan to disturb the peace and tranquillity of good men, are so insupportable as those which consist in bringing into question God's existence and government: Let the foundation be attempted, and there is no resource nor rest.—On the supposition that God did not exist, it were better not to be. Existence is a blessing only on condition of God's existence; without this, life itself would be a curse.

But O! what pleasure has the true Christian at times, in the single reflection, that God is.—The character of God, as represented in his word, is also an essential consideration

sideration of happiness, as well as his existence itself. If those perfections are retrenched, which he has ascribed to himself in his own revelation, the happiness of real Christians is subverted in its original foundation. For it is in a realizing sense of heart, of the reality and holy excellency of them, that their souls are much formed to a supreme duty, and respect to him and his ways. And they have not only sweet delight, that God is, but that he is *what* he is. *I AM THAT I AM*, was the name by which he revealed himself to Moses, for the comfort of Israel.

The universal and particular providence of God is likewise a principle, in which all good men are extremely interested. Were it not for this support, there would be no spirit left in them. As it creates them the greatest pain, not to be able by faith, to see that God, who is invisible; so, a full assurance and feeling sense of his agency and concern in all things, is to them a reviving cordial. It is a solitary condition with a good man, when his sense of these things is abated, and though God is on his right hand and on his left, yet he cannot behold him.—And indeed, my brethren, it is not an easy matter to live in the realizing sense of the being, perfections, and providence of God. *He* knows but little of himself, and what it is to have a true faith of these things, who thinks not so. To assent to these truths, indeed, is an easy matter; and to be free from all hesitation and doubt about them in our judgment; but he grossly mistakes who imagines this is that faith, in these things, which belongs to true Christians. There is a divine sense of it that is more or less their aim and consolation; and the whole compass of creature enjoyments is not able to compensate the want of this faith.

2. We may be here led to enquire, my hearers, whether the Lord God is our sun?

Do we perceive God's nature, perfections and influences of such high consequence and importance to us? Are these the sources of our truest enjoyment, and sweetest consolation? Is God's existence our life and delight? His perfections, his glory and felicity, our pleasure and entertainment?—His holy and enlightening influences, the blessings for which we pant and languish? Is God our sun? Does he form our day? Is it his presence makes our heaven? Is it his beauty, his excellency and glory shining in the face of Jesus Christ, that we admire?—Are our thoughts taken up with God?—Is he our light and our joy?

If we can answer understandingly in the affirmative to these queries, then, *blessed are ye of the Most High*. Blessed is that people whose God is the Lord, to whom *the Lord God is a Sun*. He is a Being of universal dominion; he is the Creator and Preserver of all; he sits at the helm of government, and his eyes run to and fro through all the earth. He beholds the thoughts and councils of men, and nothing can happen to his people, whereby they are affected, but what shall work for their highest good. How blessed are ye, O Christians! who have a friend of this character, of such universal sway and influence!—You know his absolute and uncontrollable power. He will do all his pleasure—he can save, when every resource fails, and all things look desperate. You know that all happiness is in his gift; *in his presence is fulness of joy*; whom he blesteth, *is blessed indeed*. Out of his favour there is no such thing as true happiness. The pleasures of such are but as crackling thorns under a pot. Happiness, derived from this world, is like the light of a meteor, which instantaneously ends in darkness. The joys of the wicked cease with their breath; and as these cease, *everlasting sorrows commence*. But then the happiness of

those who choose God for their portion, will eminently begin—to such, a natural death will be but the commencement of everlasting life and bliss—To his people, he delights to shew his mercy—he will give grace and glory.

God is more inclined to do good to those who walk uprightly, than the most affectionate parent is, to be kind and tender to a favourite child.—A woman may forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb; but God will never forget those who put their trust in him, he will never leave you nor forsake you. O Christians! live in this light—bask in his rays,—and may you enjoy an unclouded sun, until you be introduced into immortal day. It is but a little while till your sun shall never set or grow dim, but it will shine with increasing brightness, for ever and ever.—O then! walk worthy of your high calling and dignity.

3. Are there not some in this assembly, who are under the power of an absolute indifference in respect to all these things who have never had any discovery of Divine glory—to whom worldly prosperity is the most important consideration of felicity? Abundance of this world's goods can satisfy you without God; and do you, my hearers, in this situation, look upon yourselves to be real Christians? Can you read your Bible, and not hesitate about your pretensions to so high and refined a character? Can God be your exceeding joy and great reward, and yet never feel your hearts exult in his existence, perfections and universal dominion? Can he be your sun, and you never felt the warmth of his beams, quickening your hearts into love and devotion? Can he be your *centre, rest and home*; and you never experienced the attractive power of his excellency and glory, drawing your hearts into union with him, and disposing you to long and breathe

breathe after a state of greater nearness, and more free and delightful intercourse? Can you live happy without the enlightening beams of God's gracious presence? Can this world satisfy you, and its enjoyments content you? You are often asking, who will shew us any good? but never enquiring, where is God our Maker?—Surely you have no reason to consider yourselves as true Christians, whatever your pretensions may be.

Wherefore, O sinners! you, who have hitherto preferred the world and its flatteries, awake this day to choose the Lord for your God.—Is it not better for you to have God for your friend, than all the world without him? Can the world comfort you in a dying hour? *Can it befriend you before the bar of God?* Can it relieve you when doomed by the Divine sentence to eternal misery?

Wherefore, O sinners! be persuaded this day to renounce the ways of vanity and sin; and take the God of Israel for your portion, the Sun of Righteousness for your Saviour, and the Spirit of Grace for your consolation.

And may God of his infinite mercy work this persuasion in your hearts, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

S E R M O N VI.

THE EVIL AND DANGER OF SECURITY IN SIN.

BY

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MATT. xxiv. 38, 39.

For as in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking; marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noab entered into the Ark: and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.

THE discourse, of which these words are a part, was addressed by our Lord to his disciples.—The express design of it was to animate them to a steady vigilance and attention to their immortal interest—to preserve them from sloth and stupidity, the *too common effects* which Divine patience has upon mankind. This design is sufficiently visible in the account St Luke gives us of this discourse; but what is here related by St Matthew, puts the matter beyond all doubt:—*Watch therefore, for ye know not the hour when your Lord doth come.*

Hence

Hence, the propriety and force of the words of our text, with regard to the general argument and exhortation of our Lord to vigilance, stand thus :

“ There can be no season whatsoever, in which it is proper or safe to grow secure, and neglect a daily preparation for the solemn appearance of Christ, either to summon us before him by death, or to pour out trying and terrible judgments upon our land, or to bring on the general judgment of quick and dead : I say, there can be no season in which it can be safe to be secure and unprepared ; because, there is no season in which he may not come, in one or other of these ways ; and it would be shocking and irretrievable, to be surprised in an unprepared condition.”

And besides, Christ’s coming both to the general judgment and to punish wicked communities, will certainly be in a time of general security, as it was in the time of the flood, and destruction of Sodom. It is generally in this condition he comes, and surprises men by death. Therefore, it is greatly to be apprehended, that the season of our security and negligence about his coming, will be the very juncture in which he will come to our great surprise, and to the everlasting sorrow of many.—We ought then, always, *to watch, and to be ready.*

The words of our text, considered independent on their relation to the general argument, present us with the following observations.

I. We may observe the state of the old world before the flood. They were perfectly secure.—*They were eating and drinking, &c.* They were eagerly pursuing their pleasure, each in his own way, and according to his own taste. Their attention was universally engaged in those affairs, projects and applications, that were calculated only for a

present *sensual happiness*, utterly inapprehensive both of the wrath of God, that was already enkindled against them, and of those fatal effects into which it soon burst out, and mingled them in one common destruction. They had no misgivings of heart with respect to their danger; although the justice of God is always awake, and attentive to the growth and prevalence of vice; or if some of them had any apprehensions of evil, they did not suffer them to mature into serious considerations and sincere repentance. They were seduced either by a passion to imitate the general practice and opinion; or carried away by an innate desire for sensual gratifications, or overwhelmed in the cares and business of life.

Nor was this insensibility owing to want of sufficient warning. In the sixth chapter of Genesis, God tells us with an original regard to mankind in that day, *that his Spirit should not always strive with man*. This, in the strongest manner, implies, that God had remonstrated against their wickedness—used proper methods to reform them, and had given them sufficient assurance of the fatal issue of their impenitence. The Apostle Peter informs that Jesus Christ, by his Spirit, preached to them their danger, and the necessity of repentance. He acquaints us also, that Noah was employed to declare to them, in the name of God, the wickedness and danger of their practices. They had, likewise, the strongest confirmation of the truth of Noah's doctrine, for a great while before their eyes, in that long and tedious labour of his building the ark. So singular a machine must needs have struck their attention and awakened their curiosity. The use of which, when known, we may well suppose from their temper, did not fail to be matter of pleasantry and ridicule among them. How often did they call him an old foolish fanatic, and wild enthusiast! How much was he
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the subjects of the scoffs and sneers of the gayer sort, while the graver ones among them, who were admired as oracles by the meaner rabble, pronounced his conduct the height of frenzy and madness. Would not some say, 'See the doating fool, how he toils and labours to build himself a machine, by which he may escape the deluge that his disordered brain suggests to him is to come.' While others reply, 'Curse the old enthusiast, I wish he was drowned ten thousand fathom deep; for he does nothing but interrupt business, and distract the world with his reveries and nonsense.'

II. We observe, that their wickedness, insensibility and unbelief, continued to the last. The representations of the divine displeasure against them were utterly disregarded.—God's threatnings carried no terror to their hearts, and consequently formed no prevailing argument or reason for reformation. The denunciations of general ruin, without a speedy change of heart and life, were no doubt looked upon *imaginary and romantic*; fitted only to alarm weak and superstitious minds, incapable of examining such predictions by the laws of reason, and the perfections of God. We may easily conclude, that they objected to Noah's prophecies that they could not be true, because they were repugnant to the divine attributes. It was natural to blind and unbelieving sinners to assert, that it was inconsistent with the mercy and goodness of the common parent of the universe, to destroy so many millions of his creatures, and that too only for indulging those very appetites with which himself had formed them. How plausible would such arguments be? How well adapted to the taste and depraved reason of licentious and presumptuous sinners? How would they triumph in this reasoning, as a complete confutation of

the falsehood and absurdity of all the divine declarations by his servant. "What! might they not say:—Is not God's mercy and goodness infinite? Do not all his works proclaim it? Are not his goodness and benevolence as evident as his existence? But where is his goodness or his mercy, upon the doctrine of this romantic fellow, this upstart preacher? Is not this strange divinity grossly unreasonable? Such things cannot come from God that are plainly contradictory to his known and essential perfections." Noah, of consequence, must have been deemed an old fanatic; mad with new notions, and zealous to propagate the infection, and make others as mad as himself; or an artful knave, who endeavoured to dupe mankind to his private purposes, under the pretence of a divine commission.

With these principles, with this perversion of reason, it was plainly impossible, that divine threatenings could have their proper effect upon them, or that any means which were judged proper by infinite wisdom should prevail. Hence they quickly fell sacrifices to the falsehood of their strong and plausible reasonings. Vain were all attempts to undeceive their minds, and discover the uncertainty of their elaborate arguments. But the event convinced them by an awful experiment of what their reason could never reconcile with the perfections of God, or admit as worthy of their attention and credit. Their arguments drawn from the nature and perfections of God, mightily comforted their hardened hearts, and supported their blind minds, until the day in which *the fountains of the great deep were broken up*, and then their refuge of lies was swept away, and the conviction of the truth of Divine revelation was forced in upon their minds, with all the horrors of despair.—Thus many, even at this day, pretendedly argue from the Divine
perfections

perfections against Divine revelation; and like these unhappy antediluvians, will receive conviction when it is too late, from the deluge of Jehovah's wrath, which they would not believe.

III. We observe, that the vengeance of heaven, executed by a general flood, was to them extremely sudden and surprising.—They had, for a long course of years, the loudest calls to repentance, and the most express warnings of universal ruin in case of disobedience. Noah, it is probable, was a preacher of righteousness an hundred years, and endeavoured to stem the current of general wickedness, by the application of Divine threatenings, and exhortations to repentance. In this view, therefore, their destruction was not at all sudden nor unexpected. But they did not believe the truths of God; the Divine threatenings were to them as idle dreams.—*They ate, they drank, they married, and were giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered into the Ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.*—They were sure in themselves no such event would happen;—they were sure God was merciful, and in this confidence they blessed themselves, and bid defiance to such shocking and barbarous declarations. They could not, in any shape, believe them, until the fatal event administered demonstration, *with confusion* to their senses;—until they found themselves overwhelmed, and strangling in the flood, and the same vengeance pursuing them down to hell. How awful was the security and confidence in which they were surprised! While all were chearful, gay, easy, and happy, sacrificing to pleasure, indulging their natural, and as they imagined, innocent desires, looking for no such thing; they lift up their eyes, and behold the awful torrent from afar, rolling irresistibly along! O dreadful consternation!

consternation! shocking change! In a moment, from mirth, music, tranquillity and joy, to horror, amazement, and despair! Hear how they shriek and howl! but God laughs at their calamity! See how they run hither and thither, mingling without distinction; in distraction, looking for places of refuge and security! See some ascending to the tops of houses and aspiring domes! Vain expedient! for the impetuous surge overturns their strong places, and confounds their hopes! See millions fleeing to the lofty mountains, before the increasing flood! But Oh! how fruitless is their attempt! Thousands sink in the vale.—Thousands are overtaken upon the brows of the steep hills, and dashed to pieces by the lashing waves among the craggy rocks.—The residue are swept from the deceitful summit, down the long precipice, to deeper ruin! Hark, how they cry for mercy! But alas, it is now too late! These cries might have succeeded, had they been made in time; but then they judged them unnecessary, and that it was too soon, as many, even at this day, put off seeking God, and crying for mercy until they are surprised in death.

IV. We observe, that the circumstances and state of mankind at those seasons in which Jesus Christ will come to punish and judge them, will greatly resemble those at the time of the flood.—They will be times of great security, of eminent inconsideration and carelessness, with respect to the matters of religion and eternity: Seasons in which both wise and foolish virgins will be sleeping; in which prophaneness and wickedness will prevail; the love of pleasure, and the love of the world will be remarkably great and general.

1. This is often the case when Jesus Christ comes to remove particular sinners by death.—It frequently happens,

pens, that careless and impenitent sinners, who have had many warnings of their danger, and made light of them, are taken away when they least expected such an event. Innumerable are the instances of this sort. How often are men checked in the career of their madness, folly and security, with that awful language, *Thou fool! this night shall thy soul be required of thee.* Oh! my brethren, a state of security is a dangerous state! When sinners cry *Peace, peace*, then sudden destruction cometh; when they imagine themselves most distant from death, judgment, and eternity, then those events are nearest. How tremendous is it to be arrested by the grim messenger in the midst of scenes of pleasure or worldly projects, and not one day more allowed to prepare for another state!

2. This is the case when Jesus Christ comes to punish and destroy guilty and impenitent nations and churches.—Nothing is more certain than that in all past ages, seasons of Divine judgments on communities, either civil or sacred, have ever been seasons of great security, and reigning impiety.—The truth of this observation is evident with respect to the Jewish nation, in all the public judgments God poured out upon them.—And the conduct of providence towards this nation ought particularly to be observed; for it is designed as a specimen of the ordinary methods in which God will deal with communities that he has distinguished with the honourable relation to himself, as his church and people.—It is evident God never visited them with any public remarkable calamity, but some remarkable public defection is mentioned as the immediate reason and ground of it.—They indeed often disowned the imputation; they denied their guilt; were insensible of any such remarkable degeneracy, for which they should be so severely visited; they refused to accept those judgments as the punishment of their

their sins, and had the common disease of an unhumbléd heart to exculpate themselves.—But from them we learn, that public judgments on a professing people are always the ordinary effect and designed punishment of public declensions from their duty, and regard to the covenant and oaths of God they are under. And their not seeing themselves in this light, nor being affected with them, is no argument at all that this is not the case.

3. This will be the case when Jesus Christ shall be revealed from heaven to hold the general judgment.—Awful security and awful wickedness will then prevail; for scarcely will faith be found upon the earth.

There is a day, a dreadful day, fixed by Divine decree, when Jesus Christ shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels in flaming fire, to take vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the gospel;—to call all nations, tongues and languages; all the kindreds of the earth, and every individual that ever existed to his bar;—to lay open the secrets of every heart;—to disclose the hidden springs of action, and determine the real characters of men, and fix their eternal destiny! One would imagine, that the certainty of an event of such high consequence, and everlasting importance, would have an irresistible effect; that it would interest and penetrate every heart, and determine all universally to the most studious and incessant attention to those things, whereby they might be prepared to stand in the awful day! And yet we are assured, notwithstanding, that it will be a time of great and general security. Jesus Christ's coming will be as a thief in the night, when men are in a profound sleep, altogether inapprehensive of danger. *As in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood*

flood came and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.

I proceed now to close this discourse with a few reflections.

How great is the resemblance between our present state and that of mankind before the flood! The similitude bears in all respects, and that too with peculiar aggravations on our part. It is so glaring to every serious observer, that the very mention of it were sufficient to bring all to an humble confession, and mournful sense of our danger. But it is the dreadful unhappiness of sinners, the nearer they approach to judgment and ruin, the more blind and insensible they grow.—This arises from two general causes. 1. The proper nature of sinful courses, which always blind the mind and harden the heart. 2. The additional judgment of God, who permits the malignity of the human heart to exert itself with less controul.—He ceases to apply those usual methods of restraint,—gives them up more to themselves,—leaves them to the government of their own heart's lusts,—denies them restraining grace,—takes his Spirit from them.

The resemblance between us and the old world is evident in the following respects.—The universal prevalence of deep security,—the great means which God is using with us to reclaim us,—and the amazing wickedness which abounds among all ranks of men notwithstanding.

1. The resemblance is evident in universal prevalence of deep security. Let us look around us, and do we not find in ourselves and others, stupidity and unbelief in its strongest likeness, to what we see drawn for those beyond the flood? Are we acting any otherwise than they? Are we doing any thing else, but *eating and drinking, marrying*

ing and giving in marriage, buying, selling, planting, building, &c.—though the wrath of God is ready to burst upon our devoted heads!—Are we doing any thing but increasing our guilt, which is already gone up to Heaven? Are we not, by adding iniquity to iniquity, blowing up the fury of God Almighty to an unquenchable flame? Are we not walking in security, taking no notice either of his word or providence, as though we were resolved to make trial of what God will do after all his threatenings? O foolish people! do you thus provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are you stronger than he? Remember, if you thus continue, your feet shall slide in due time. The things that come upon you make haste: And nothing but repentance,—nothing but a speedy entrance into the Gospel-ark,—nothing but taking refuge immediately under Emmanuel's wings, can secure you an escape.

3. The resemblance between us and the old world is strong, in respect to the great means God is using with us to reclaim us. Noah was a preacher of righteousness to them; but we have Jesus Christ and his Apostles preaching righteousness to us. The exhortations to repentance,—the warnings of our danger recorded in the scriptures, are very many; and these exhortations and warnings are so clear and pointed, that he that runs may read them. He must be absolutely stupid, and nearly sunk into a state of Atheism, that does not perceive and understand their voice. They proclaim aloud the height and enormity of our wickedness, and the displeasure of Heaven against us.

How loudly have we been called upon to repent and change our ways! How earnestly and frequently has the importance and necessity hereof been inculcated upon us! How express have been the warnings we have had,
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and still have, of the danger of our natural courses of sin and pleasure!—How often have the terrors of that wrath, to which we expose ourselves by impenitence, formality and negligence in religion, been painted and exhibited to our view from the word of God!—How distinctly have the glories and divine rewards of the Gospel been set before us, to induce us to prefer the service and work of Jesus Christ, to all the flattering, delusive, and sinful enjoyments of this world!—How many events have we met with, in the course of our lives, to rouse our attention to the vanity of all things below the sun!—*We have had line upon line, and precept upon precept;*—and notwithstanding all this, does not an awful and fatal security prevail among us, as it did among the inhabitants of the antediluvian world?

4. The amazing wickedness which abounds among all ranks of men, bespeaks a too great likeness between us and them. It is recorded of them, that *all flesh had corrupted their way, and the earth was filled with violence.* And is not this awfully true with regard to us?—I cannot now pursue this argument in all its parts, or give the black detail of reigning vices, which demonstrate the imitation to be general and true. Would to God that the matters and evidences applicable to the support of this representation, were less obvious, and less abundant! What a growing contempt for Divine revelation takes place among us?—What attempts are daily made to weaken its authority and influence?—Vain are all devices to support virtue by ingenious theories, and laboured arguments, when the plain and simple doctrines of the Gospel of Jesus Christ are set aside. O! how blasphemous an insult on the perfections of God, is the attempt to substitute other methods to promote virtue in
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the room of the ever-blessed Gospel, in the place of this glorious instrument of heaven for the support of religion ! Will not a jealous God take vengeance, and confound the designs of all such deistical and antediluvian builders !—But leaving this, what sort of wickedness does not abound among us ? How is the name, the dreadful name of God profaned ? How often are our ears stunned with hellish oaths, and direful imprecations ?—How are God's sabbaths abused ? How are the ordinances, and special institutions of Jesus Christ neglected ? What restraint of prayer ? What thoughtlessness, respecting all the great realities of eternity, take place ? How does beastly drunkenness, and more than beastly uncleanness, in all their horrid forms, defile our land ?—And how has love and friendship among mankind ceased ? What extortion and injustice ;—what tricking, defrauding, over-reaching and cheating, almost every where abound ?—Alas ! how few are of clean hands, how few are of pure hearts !

How are mankind plunged and sunk into iniquity !—How do they add drunkenness to theft, licentiousness to liberty, profaneness to foolish jesting ; and to all these, a total neglect of Divine admonitions, and yet vainly imagine they shall have peace !—Will not the eternal God cause his jealousy to smoke against such secure and bold transgressors ?—Jehovah's wrath is already enkindled, and unless we awake to repentance and reformation, it will surely *burn unto the lowest hell !* It will consume *the young man and the virgin, the suckling also, with the man of grey hairs.*

Let us hearken to the Divine voice, and not be found proclaiming defiance to the vengeance of Heaven. O ! that secure, stupid, and careless sinners would make a stand ; lay your ways seriously to heart ; consider what

is likely to become of you, and what will you do at the awful appearance of the Son of Man!

Go, confess your sins; mourn for your iniquities; break off from your transgressions; and cry unto the Lord, and it may be, that he will restrain the fierceness of deserved wrath, and bestow blessings upon you.

Let the wicked man forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel!—Let there be a general preparation. The Lord is on his way. Behold he comes quickly! Gird up the loins of your minds, and go ye forth to meet him, repenting of your sins, acquiescing in the Gospel-plan of reconciliation, observing all the commandments and ordinances of God. But if this advice seem evil unto you, prepare, O Sinners, for judgment! Prepare to meet an incensed Judge! Our God is a consuming fire:—*Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire, and brimstone, and an horrible tempest; this shall be the portion of your cup.*

Let it be the fervent prayer of all, that God would awaken the secure, alarm the stupid and inconsiderate, and turn multitudes to righteousness.

SERMON VII.

GROWTH IN GRACE.

BY

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2 PETER iii. 18.

—But grow in Grace.—

NOTHING can be more worthy of our attention than the great truths of Religion.—There is no science so sublime in its object, so sure in its principles, or so important in its consequences. Nothing can be conceived more extensive for speculation, and at the same time more immediately influential upon our conduct. Theory and practice are here inseparably connected, and *the acknowledging of the truths* will always lead to *godliness*. A superficial acquaintance with some particular doctrines, and a bigotted attachment to favourite tenets, may soon be obtained, and considered by many as an important acquisition. But the least reflection must convince us, that such have reason to conclude, *they are not taught*

taught of the Lord, and know nothing yet as they ought to know.

There is in Religion a connection, a harmony, a chain so firmly united, that it cannot be understood, if taken only in detached parcels. Like a beautiful and useful machine when deprived of any essential part, the whole is deformed or destroyed. In a coherent system of doctrine, there can be nothing useless, nothing repugnant, nothing which ought not to occupy the very place which the Divine Author, who composed the whole, has assigned it. What will become of Religion if we embrace any of its doctrines separately? What is the Religion of the Gospel, if the law can justify, or the Redeemer be not honoured as the righteousness and strength of his people? What becomes of Religion, if faith be not productive of good works, or an hope is entertained of seeing God without the love and practice of holiness? How mutilated, how changed, how opposite to itself the whole can be made to appear, when only a part is brought forward to view! and how unsafe and wavering must that man remain, who rests satisfied with small attainments, and a partial knowledge of Divine truths?

The Apostle Paul reproves the Hebrews for their little progress in knowledge, and urges them to go on unto perfection. There are some truths which may be considered as *principles of the doctrine of Christ*; so plainly revealed, so simple and evident, that mere babes in understanding can receive and digest them. But to be always contented with these, without aiming at farther progress, would be to feed upon milk, when an advanced age renders it proper to take stronger meat.

In the verse, of which our text is a part, the Apostle Peter also exhorts believers to grow in knowledge. *Grow,* says he, *in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and*

Saviour Jesus Christ. He comprises all religious knowledge, all that believers ought to be anxious to attain, as far as it relates to salvation, in knowing the Lord Jesus Christ; and with great propriety, for *in him the fulness of the God-head dwells bodily.* The eternal Son is one with the Father, and is very God. *All the riches of the full assurance of understanding, is found in the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ.* In him also, as Mediator, are *hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge;* and to him, as the glorious centre, all the lines of Religion are directed. To *know him, therefore,* and to experience *the power of his resurrection,* was the sum of Paul's desires, and ought to be the highest wish of every believer.—In this life, at best, we *see through a glass darkly.* The clearest manifestations of the Redeemer are but the *biding of his power;* and the most lively views of faith discover only a *part of his ways,* and prove how *little a portion* is known of him. How little do his people know of that depth of humiliation to which the Saviour stooped; of the greatness of his sufferings; and of the height of that glory to which their Emmanuel is now exalted!—How little have they discovered of the mystery of their union with Christ, and of the value of his righteousness! How small is their acquaintance with the ways of the Lord in his sanctuary, and his dealings in Providence! After the longest experience, after the greatest progress, there is still a *breadth and length, a depth and height,* which they have not comprehended; there remain riches in the love of Christ which pass their knowledge, and leave an unbounded field for farther investigation. Rest not, therefore, satisfied with what you have attained, *but grow,* says the Apostle, *in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*

But Peter, pre mises as his first and principal exhortation, to *grow in Grace*. This may be considered as comprising knowledge, and including still more. The last part of the verse can be viewed as explanatory of the first, while it directs in what way believers are chiefly to grow in grace, namely, by growing in the knowledge of Christ, as we shall directly see.

Without referring you to the context, which would lead us too far from our subject, let it suffice to observe, that the exhortation now before us, is immediately connected with the warning the Apostle had just given, respecting the abuse of scripture, which was often *wrested by the unlearned and unstable, to their own destruction*. This gave occasion for the last word of advice, and one of the most important Peter ever wrote, *but grow in grace*. As if the Apostle had said, whatever others may do with the scripture, however erroneous in their doctrines, or wicked in their lives they may prove, be you, believers, upon your guard. Beware lest ye be *led away with the error of the wicked*. Although you cannot totally and finally fall from grace, if ever ye have, indeed, been united to Christ, yet ye can *fall from your own steadfastness*; you may lose your comforts, and forfeit your usefulness; you may become involved in darkness, and bring a train of afflictions and chastisements upon yourselves. As an antidote against this, as the best preservative against backsliding, as the sum of all the Christian duties, *grow in Grace*. Whatever progress you may have made in Religion, you must still proceed. There is no fixed point at which a believer may stop. Each portion of life has its peculiar duties. To what degree soever you have brought your sanctification, unless you carry it farther, go on and persevere, you will act contrary to the spirit and letter of the Gospel. You may be nearer the

end than others who have not made the same progress; but you have not yet obtained the prize. You may have performed the duties of youth, but those of manhood and old age remain to be discharged. You may have fulfilled the duties of prosperity, but those of adversity, of sickness, and of dying, are yet to be accomplished. To confine yourselves to a certain circle of duties, comforts and exercises; to stop at any determined period; to be satisfied with what you have already attained of love, of faith or holiness, is so contrary to the nature of true Religion; that whoever finds a reluctance for farther advancement, or feels lukewarm respecting a progress towards higher perfection, has reason to call in question his former attainments, and examine narrowly whether the Spirit of Christ dwelleth in him.

Religion, like every other principle in the soul of man, is progressive. Wherever it is planted, it will increase. This is one never-failing mark of its truth and its divinity. It is not only the command of God, but it is the sincere desire of every regenerate soul, to *grow in Grace*. This is the subject to which your attention is this evening to be called. To assist you in forming right ideas respecting growth in grace, and excite you to attend thereto, is what, as the Lord shall enable me, I now propose. In doing this, I must first explain the apostolic exhortations; and then, secondly, direct you to the best means for complying with the same.

GROW IN GRACE. This is the exhortation of the Apostle, this the solemn charge, expressive of a duty universally binding upon all believers, and extending to Christians of every description. None so young in the service of Christ as to be exempted; and none so old or advanced in station, character or perfection, as to be raised above it. All have need of growth in grace, and the

the exhortation is addressed to all. To enable you to understand this, I must *first* shew you wherein growth in grace consists; and *then* what is implied in the exhortation.

To know wherein growth in grace consists, it is necessary previously to ascertain the idea that is here to be affixed to the word GRACE. This, in its usual and highest acceptation, means the love of God; but it means his love considered in a particular view, as it is exercised towards sinners, as it has for its object, not only the miserable, the helpless and forlorn, but the rebellious, the vile, the unworthy, who have forfeited his favour and deserve his wrath. Thus, *by grace ye are saved*; that is, not by merit, but by love freely extended to guilty and polluted creatures. And again, *the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men*; that is, the love of God, who so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son, is now, by a preached Gospel, made manifest to Jews and Gentiles, and publicly offered to all, without distinction of nation, age, sex, or character.

But GRACE expresses also, in the language of scripture, the effects of this love, and comprehends all the benefits of the new covenant, as they are freely bestowed and savingly applied to the elect sinner. Thus justification through the imputed righteousness of Christ, is grace. *Being justified freely by his grace*. All that is wrought by the blessed influences of the Holy Spirit in the souls of his people, is grace. Effectual calling, a new heart, sanctification and perseverance; in one word, whatever is necessary to render believers meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, is all grace. *Of his fulness have we all received, and grace for grace*. The foundation is laid in grace, and when the head stone is brought

brought forth, the redeemed of the Lord will shout in regard to the whole plan, *Grace, grace.*

It is with respect to grace in this last view we are to understand the Apostle in the text, when he exhorts believers to GROW IN GRACE. The love of God on his part is not susceptible of increase. It is perfect and absolutely unchangeable. *He* loves with an everlasting love; and whom he loveth, he loveth to the end. But *we* may advance in experiencing the blessed effects of redeeming love. We may grow in the graces of the Spirit, and become more universally holy. This is what the Apostle means, and this is what I now must endeavour to explain.—Could I content myself in summing up the whole in few words, I might say,—to grow in grace is to improve in holiness. It is to become more conformable to the image of the Son of God, more established in the truths of religion, and more genuine, habitual and uniform in all our acts of obedience. But this general view of the subject is not sufficient. To shew you in what it consists, I must descend to particulars. I observe, therefore,—

1. To grow in grace is *to grow in habitual repentance*; to become more humble and contrite; *to know the plague of our own heart*, and loathe and abhor ourselves on that account more sincerely before God.—The leading exercises of the soul in conversion, respected the malignant nature and exceeding greatness of our sins. The Holy Spirit first taught us from the word to know our misery, and mourn over our depraved natures; and he continues, by his blessed operations, to lead us into clearer views of the spirituality of the Divine law, and more accurate discoveries of our own vileness and unworthiness. Under such teachings, a greater hatred against sin must arise, a more constant sorrow for it, and ardent longings
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to be delivered from *the body of this death*. To grow in grace is to grow in habitual repentance.

2. To grow in grace is to grow in *faith*. *We are bound*, says the Apostle, *to thank God always for you brethren, because that your faith groweth exceedingly*. By adverting to the nature of faith, and what is predicated in the word of God concerning it, you will be able to see in what respects the saints may grow in faith, and how essential a part this constitutes of the subject now before us.

Saving faith is not merely the simple act of the understanding, which receives a report, and assents to its truth upon credible evidence, but it is a complex act, comprising also the consent of the will, and conformable exercises of the affections. It is not only a believing there is a Saviour, and even that we need his help, but it is an actual acceptance of him as he is offered in the Gospel; a receiving him for ourselves in all his glorious offices, as the Lord our righteousness. But what now are the effects of this faith? What does it produce? How does it work? We answer in few words:—By faith the soul becomes united to Christ. *He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit. I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one*. The Spirit of Christ is the bond of this union upon his part, and faith upon the part of believers.—Faith is that grace by which we are justified. *Being justified by faith*.—"Not that we are acceptable to God upon account of the worthiness of our faith, but because only the satisfaction and righteousness of Christ is our righteousness before God, and we cannot receive and apply the same any other way than by faith only."—Faith purifies the heart, and *without works it is dead*.—It magnifies the Lord Jesus, *Unto you who believe he is precious*. It introduces the soul to solid peace and rest.

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We which have believed do enter into rest.—Faith overcomes the world.—Faith leads to a patient waiting for the accomplishment of the promises. *He that believeth, shall not make haste.* It directs to the throne of grace, and enables the saints to draw near with a true heart.—It is a grace more precious than gold, and the believer must expect to have it tried. In a word, faith is the gift of God. It is the *substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.* It is that by which the believer lives. He walks by faith, and it will abide until it has performed its whole work, and is at last changed into vision. *I live, said Paul, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

From this general view, you may anticipate what is meant by growing in faith. It is to become more confirmed in the truth; and, from doubts and fears, to rise into a strong and filial confidence. It is to realize the union which is effected with Christ, and more habitually to derive all needed supplies from him, as our living and covenant Head. We grow in faith, when it becomes more active, vigorous and productive of good works. When we are enabled in the spiritual warfare to take *the shield of faith, and therewith quench the fiery darts of the wicked.* And when in the darkest seasons and the severest trials, we learn to say, *Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.*—Then we improve, when we are taught more cheerfully to submit to the yoke of Christ; to look unto Jesus, and to esteem it our highest honour and happiness to deny ourselves, take up our cross daily and follow him. *Lord, said the disciples, increase our faith.* To grow in grace is to grow in faith.

3. To grow in grace is to improve in our *love* to God. To love God is to *set him always before us, as seeing him who is invisible*; to meditate upon his glorious perfections, and feel a fervent outgoing of the heart towards him, as the first, the greatest, and the best of Beings, the treasure, the portion of the soul, our Father and our God. We grow in love when we increase in our desires to become holy as he is holy, and prefer his communion and fellowship above our chief joys. When having tasted that he is gracious, and experienced his love shed abroad upon our hearts, we are pained at his absence, and anxious to draw near to him, and have him *lift up the light of his countenance upon us*. Then we grow in love, when we feel it becoming *strong as death*, and engaging us to live for him, *whose we are and whom we serve*. When we can lose the creature, and yet find a satisfying portion in God. And when we can truly say, not only with respect to the earthly sanctuary, but to his courts in glory, *My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God! because thy loving kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee. Thus will I bless thee while I live. I will lift up my hands in thy name. My soul shall be fed as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips*. To grow in grace is to grow in love to God.

4. To grow in grace is to advance in *zeal* for the glory of God. Innumerable motives press upon the mind to engage us to glorify him. *Whether we live we are the Lord's, and whether we die we are the Lord's, whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's*. We are witnesses for God; a people formed for himself, that we should *shew forth his praise*. When we understand these motives better, when we feel their influence more, and by these are urged to dedicate all we are and have to God,
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and improve our influence upon others around us to do the same, then we grow in zeal. We grow in zeal when we become more uniform in our obedience, more single in our views, and more fervently active in shewing forth the praises of him who hath called us out of darkness into his marvellous light. The zeal of thine house, says the Psalmist, hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me. Horror hath taken hold upon me, because of the wicked that forsake thy law. *Oh let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end! Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion!*

There is indeed frequently in young converts a zeal without knowledge; a boldness of spirit, unrestrained by prudence, and untaught by experience. Like Jehu, they are ready to say,—*Come with me and see my zeal for the Lord.* The principle in part is right, although it is mixed with unhallowed passions and tainted with pride. But a more extensive acquaintance with the deceitfulness of their own hearts, and maturer attention to the nature and difficulties of the Christian life, is found soon to humble their forward spirits, and lead them into the paths of sober and genuine zeal.—*It is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing;* and the Lord Jesus gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. It is proper to serve God, not with a luke-warm soul, which offers the lame and the sick, but with our whole heart, with raised affections, and with fervency of spirit. To grow in grace is to grow in zeal.

5. To grow in grace is to become more heavenly minded. The Redeemer has brought life and immortality to light, and opened prospects to our view, which could only be obtained by a Divine revelation. He has raised his people, especially under the New Testament dispensation,

sation, to exalted privileges, and made us to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. To comprehend these privileges more clearly, to relish them higher, and have our conversation more and more as citizens of heaven, is to grow in heavenly mindedness.—When the temper and views of strangers and pilgrims prevail in us, and we find our affections more placed upon things above; when the work of heaven is more pleasant and habitual, our worship spiritual, and our praises affectionate, then we become more heavenly minded. To meditate upon the heavenly Jerusalem, the innumerable company of angels, and the general assembly of the church, and first-born which are written in heaven; to feel an habitual desire of joining with them:—

As with a Seraph's voice to sing!
To fly as on a Cherub's wing!
Performing with unwearied hands,
The present Saviour's high commands

to be weaned from this world; willing to stay, and yet desirous to depart and be with Christ; this is to become more heavenly minded, and this is to grow in grace.

6. Finally, to grow in grace, is to be emptied of all dependence upon ourselves, and practically to constitute the blessed Jesus our all and in all. He must increase, but we must decrease. We take him for our all when first we believe; but what that fully implies, we do not, when first we believe, yet understand. To grow in grace is the unfolding of that mystery. It is experimentally to know that Christ is of God made unto us, *sanctification*: That in the Lord we have not only righteousness, but in him also we have *strength*. It is to experience that when we are weak, then we are strong, and when we grow downward in humility, patience and resignation, then we most effectually

effectually grow upwards in holiness. In this last particular, perhaps more than in any other, the saints are enabled to discern their growth in grace. They become in their own eyes more vile, more empty and helpless, while the grace of Christ proves sufficient for them, and his *strength is made perfect in their weakness*.

Time would fail me to enumerate all the fruits of the Spirit, or descend to all the branches of duty in which a growth in grace is exemplified. Let it suffice to close this part of the subject, by saying in one word, which sums up the whole, that as far as our wills become conformable to the will of God, so far and no farther we grow in grace.—To this we are exhorted in the text. This distinguishes the real Christian from the hypocrite, the living saint from the dead formalist. To this the principle implanted in regeneration will prompt us; and this the Redeemer expressly declares to be characteristic of his disciples. *Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit. I am the vine, ye are the branches, he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit, for without me ye can do nothing. Herein is my Father glorified that ye bear much fruit, so shall ye be my disciples.*

Having seen what is meant by GROWING IN GRACE, permit me now, in a few short observations, to shew you what is *implied* in this exhortation. And,

1. It is evident, to grow in grace, implies that a soul has *received grace*. The tree must be planted before it can grow. The Lord is to be sought and served *after the due order*. The exhortation indeed extends to all who read the word. It is the duty of all men to grow in grace. But the unconverted must obtain grace, they must first receive the Lord Jesus as their Saviour, before they can follow him; the principle of holiness must be formed

formed in the heart by regeneration, before it can possibly grow.

2. Growing in grace, implies an *actual increase*. It is not a mere nominal, but a real; not a fictitious, but a true and substantial advancement in holiness. Who ever has grown in grace, is become wiser and better than he was before. It is opposed to a stupid satisfaction with past attainments, and especially to all backsliding. It has its own peculiar marks and evidences, by which it may be distinguished from all counterfeits, and is essentially different from the highest accomplishments which the natural man can possibly possess.

By study and attention, an extensive view not only of science in general, but of religion, may be obtained. The doctrines can be known, their connections observed, and the arguments by which they are supported, properly brought forward. Reason and revelation supply materials for vast erudition, and this, when joined to great gifts, may recommend a man to the world; but after all, that man may fail of the grace of God, and his knowledge only serve to puff him up. *Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. Though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and have not charity, I am nothing. Thou believest there is one God, thou doest well, the devils also believe and tremble. A mere growth in knowledge or gifts, is not a growth in grace.*

Education, connections and prejudice, may create a violent attachment to some particular doctrines and forms of worship; and in this it is easy to go great lengths; it is very easy to cry, *The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord*, without possessing the least degree of holiness

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or love to the Lord of the Temple.—To grow in *bigotry*, is not to grow in grace.

From a weakness of understanding, from passions liable to be quickly moved, and from unsettled principles, the human mind is susceptible of strange impressions, and is often wrought up to most extravagant heights; but a growth in *enthusiasm* is no growth in grace.

Our holy religion is a most reasonable service. Its principles will bear the severest scrutiny, and believers can give a reason of the hope that is in them. Nothing therefore that is dishonourable to God, unworthy of man, or that is not founded upon scripture, must be considered as genuine. *To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.*

3. The exhortation to grow in grace, implies, that *holiness is progressive*; that religion, when it first begins in the heart, is not so extensive; not, if I may use the expression, so complete in all its parts, so distinguished in all its features, as it afterwards becomes. It is the usual way of God, in all his works, to rise from smaller beginnings to perfection; and we know it is so in religion. By progressive steps his people are led, and they become gradually more and more prepared to glorify him on earth, and enjoy him in heaven. Hence, believers are compared to babes, to children, to young men, and to fathers. The very words imply very different degrees of knowledge, strength, usefulness, and perfection,

4. This exhortation implies a *positive duty* incumbent upon all believers, to desire and strive to grow in grace. It is their duty, because it is the express command of God—because it is promised to all his people—and because it has always been the wish of the saints, their *principal* prayer and constant practice. The passages in scripture

ture which refer to each of these are so numerous, that to mention them would be almost to repeat the Bible. As a proof respecting the practice of the saints, let me only remind you of the Apostle Paul, 'Do you know,' (to use the words of a very celebrated preacher *) 'do you know a greater than Paul? Can you conceive virtue in a more eminent degree? Behold a man fired with zeal, making what he thought the cause of God his own cause, God's enemies his enemies, the interest of God the interest of himself! Behold a man who turns his attention to truth, and the moment he discovers it, embraces and openly avows it! Behold a man, who not content to be an ordinary Christian, and to save himself alone, aspiring at the glory of carrying through the whole world, for public advantage, that light which had illuminated himself!—Behold a man, preaching, ^{ing} writing!—What am I saying? Behold a man, ^{ing} suffering, ^{ing} dying, and sealing with his blood the truths he taught! An ^{on} ardent zealot, a sincere convert, an accomplished minister, a bleeding martyr?—Shew me in the modern or primitive church, a greater character than Paul! Let any man produce a Christian who had more reason to be satisfied with himself, and who had more right to pretend that he had discharged all his duties! yet this very man, this Paul, *forgot those things which were behind!* This very Paul was *pressing forward!* This is the man who feared he should be *a cast away!* And you *smoking flax*, you *bruised reed*, you who have hardly taken root in the Christian soil, you who have hardly a spark of love to God, do you think your piety sufficient? Are you the man to leave off endeavouring to make new advances?

5. To add no more, this exhortation implies, that as it is our duty to attend to this one thing, so we may be af-

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* Saurin Serm. 1 Cor. ix. 26, 27.

fured that God has provided proper *means* for our obtaining the same. Sanctification, considered on the part of God, and as wrought by him in our souls, is one of the benefits of the covenant of grace, and inseparably follows after justification. But he deals with us as rational beings, and therefore, sanctification considered on our part, becomes an essential duty; and we must see to it, that we are faithful and diligent in the use of those means which God has appointed, and which are wisely calculated to produce a growth in grace. But what are those means? In what way, and by what method can this great end be best attained?

The reply to these enquiries was the **SECOND** thing I promised, and which I now intended to make:—But the subject is too important to be slightly passed over, and to do justice to it, will require more time than is allotted to our present exercise. I shall therefore reserve this, with an application to the whole, as the substance of another discourse. And shall now close, with only requesting you seriously to reflect upon the duty to which we have been exhorted.—**GROW IN GRACE!** How great, how solemn a charge! Like a voice from heaven, it addresses us with authority Divine, and love inexpressible! A voice, similar to that which called to the Apostle in the Apocalypse, *Come up hither.*

Adore, my brethren, the God of grace, and bless his holy name for providing a ransom!—*What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.* A new and living way is consecrated for us, and we have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus. How sure the atoning efficacy of his death!

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How rich the justifying merit of his righteousness! For his sake the Holy Spirit will dwell with men, and powerfully apply what the Redeemer purchased. He renews their souls, bestows his graces, and by a progressive sanctification, prepares them *as a bride adorned for her husband.*

But is this the great work which God has wrought? Is this the work which he has been carrying on in the hearts of his people in every age? And are there thousands now upon earth, who are united to Christ, and, by growing in grace, are preparing to dwell for ever with him? Let it alarm your minds, and excite in you most earnest and fervent desires to participate in the same blessing: O that you may obtain grace to surmount every obstacle, and resolve to join the company of the redeemed! O that you may say and perform what you say, *we will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you!*

This world is the first stage of our existence.—Here we are preparing for future scenes, where our state will be unalterably fixed in happiness or woe. Now is the accepted time for us, *behold now is the day of salvation.* Dream not of any probation hereafter. From hell there is no reprieve. The wicked will go away with the irrevocable curse of the Supreme Judge, and remain sealed down into an everlasting, an absolutely everlasting punishment. There scripture leaves them, *and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever.* While life then remains, and the means of grace are enjoyed, harden not your hearts, and wrong not your own souls. The Son of God has come to you in a preached gospel; see that you reverence him.—*Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little:—Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.* Amen.

S E R M O N V I I I .

GROWTH IN GRACE.

BY

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2 PET. iii. 18.

—*But grow in Grace.*—

THE service in the Temple, under the Old Testament, was fitted to the dispensation of the church before the coming of the Messiah. The types and sacrifices directed the views of believers to the Lamb of God, who was to take away the sins of the world; and when their faith was in exercise, they attended the offerings with raised affections, and surrounded the altar with songs of praise. At their three great stated feasts, they repaired to Jerusalem with great willingness, and cheerfully surmounted the difficulties and discouragements which attended them on the way. The Psalmist celebrates this in the 84th psalm, and pronounces a blessing upon those, *in whose hearts are the ways of them*; who having fixed their happiness in God as their highest end, rejoice in all the

the ways which lead to him, and are faithful in using the means he has appointed to strengthen their graces, and keep up their communion with him. *They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.* As they travelled towards the temple, their company increased by the accession of more from the towns through which they passed; and with respect to individuals, instead of wearying with the fatigues of the journey, they found their strength recruited the nearer they came to Jerusalem.—What is said of the Israelites in that psalm, is fully accomplished in the highest sense of the words in all believers under the New Testament dispensation. *They go from strength to strength.* They grow in grace, and shall at last become perfect in glory. The righteous shall hold on their way, and they that have clean hands shall be *stronger and stronger*.—They are changed from one degree of glorious grace to another, until at length *every one of them appeareth before God in Zion*. Blessed therefore is the man *in whose heart are the ways of them*; who loves, and earnestly improves the means of grace, because of their connection with the end, and has no care, delight or pleasure so near his heart.—What those means of grace are, we now, my brethren, are particularly to consider.

In a former discourse upon growth in grace, I proposed—

1. To explain the exhortation of the Apostle. And,
2. To direct you to the best means for complying with it.

The *first* I have finished.—It now remains to attend to the *second*. What are the MEANS appointed of God? In what way, and by what method can we best attain a

growth in grace?—I shall first premise a *general* answer, and then descend to *particulars*.

FIRST, I answer in *general*, that we cannot expect to grow in grace without *vigorous exertions*. The progress of Christians is always mentioned in scripture, by terms which imply the most active and resolute efforts. It is called a warfare, a wrestling, a race; and the exercises of believers are described as such, which call up all their attention, and require their utmost exertions. They are to give *all diligence* to be *strong*, to quit themselves *like men*, to *watch*, and to *be sober*; they are to *strive to enter in*, and in a certain sense, are to use violence, *for the violent take it by force*. The obstacles which render such efforts necessary, are not on the part of religion, in itself considered, *for the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace*; but they arise from the remaining depravity in our own hearts; that *law in our members*, which wars against the law of our minds, and too often brings us *into captivity to the law of sin*. We are not therefore to suppose when we are justified by believing in Christ, our whole work is done. Then first we put on *the armour*, and must *fight the good fight of faith* before we can obtain the crown. If we sleep, the enemy will soon sow tares; our corrupt natures, before we are aware of the danger, will prevail against us, and sins and lusts which for the time appear dead, will arise and put on new strength. It is *the hand of the diligent that maketh rich*, as well in religion, as in the common affairs of life. To grow in grace, we must be *active*, we must be *vigilant*. Again, I answer in *general*, that to grow in grace, the believer must always remember his total dependence for direction and assistance in every duty, upon the Lord Jesus. *Work out*, says the Apostle, *your*

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own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his own good pleasure. Exertions on our part are altogether compatible with the operation of God in and upon us. So far from proving an objection against salvation through grace, this very union of duty and promise, of our efforts and the Divine aid, is a strong argument of its truth, and recommends it as worthy of all acceptation. These very exertions prove that of ourselves we are insufficient, and that *our life is hid with Christ in God.* We are not called to this warfare in our own strength, or sent out upon our own charge. *My son,* says Paul to Timothy, *be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.*—Without remembering this, the Christian will find himself, however well furnished in other respects, like David when girded in the armour of Saul, incumbered with weight, but unfit for the combat. *I cannot go with these,* said the stripling hero to the monarch; and *I cannot go with these,* will be the reply of every believer, whom experience has taught; but *I will go in the strength of the Lord God: I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only.*

But let me specify particulars, and enumerate some of the principal means, which are most efficacious, with the Divine blessing, to promote our growth in grace.

The *first* I shall name and recommend to you is, a frequent meditation upon the once crucified but now exalted Saviour. This I name first, not only because it is a leading motive, but because our Apostle has mentioned it in this very verse before us, as most intimately connected with growth in grace.

In the life of the blessed Jesus, we have the brightest display of the beauty of holiness. The law of the Lord was within his heart. Zeal for his Father's glory like a

fire consumed him. *He went about doing good.* What an example! What love to God! What love to man! How holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners! How amiable religion appears in him; and how indelible the impressions which a believing meditation upon the life of Christ must make upon the soul! When Moses returned from conversing with Jehovah in the mount, his face shone; and frequent converse with the holy Saviour will make believers shine, and shed a lustre upon all their conduct. Beholding his life will change them into the same image, and compel the world to acknowledge *that they have been with Jesus.*

But in the death of Christ, an equal if not a superior motive, is found to engage us to fervent holiness. The malignant nature of sin appears in contrasting it with the law of God; but it is never seen in all its odious and accursed colours so clearly as when viewed in a crucified Saviour. God *spared not* his only Son, but delivered him up to all the demands of Divine justice, when he made *his soul an offering for sin.*—Who can remember the agonies of Gethsemane, the horrors, pains, and conflicts of the cross, and not find an abhorrence of sin excited in his soul? Who, when meditating on the sufferings of the Redeemer, can refrain from exclaiming, Shall I cherish those lusts which murdered my Saviour!—shall I dishonour God with my iniquities, and renew that guilt which nothing less than the precious blood of his Son could expiate! By the cross of Christ *the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world!*

The whole character of the Mediator, his glorious person, his important offices, the gracious errand upon which he came, the wonderful methods by which he finished his work, and the faithfulness and compassion which he now exercises while seated on his throne, are all calculated, when viewed

viewed in faith, and frequently meditated upon, to constrain us henceforth not to live unto ourselves, but unto him who died for us, and rose again. By this we shall grow in grace.

But *another* mean, and one absolutely necessary for growing in grace is, the *word of God*, the frequent reading of it in secret, the hearing of it explained in public, and attending faithfully upon the ordinances.—In the holy scriptures the soundest principles of morality are taught, striking examples are exhibited, and the most animating sanctions of rewards and punishments are produced. *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction and for instruction in righteousness.* It is through the truth that God sanctifies his people. His *word is truth*. But to profit by the word, it is necessary to attend to its genuine meaning, to view it not only in detached passages, but in its connection, and thus endeavour to understand the design and scope of the Holy Spirit. There are, however, some important texts, which are more immediately calculated to direct, to warn and to encourage the soul in the practice of holiness. These ought to be fully digested, laid up in the memory, and by frequent meditation rendered familiar. The Emperor Antoninus, gave this lesson to himself:—"As surgeons always carry their instruments with them, to be ready for any sudden emergency; so let what you have learned be prompt, and ready at hand, to direct you in whatever relates to things divine or human.*" And Seneca relates this sentiment of Demetrius the Cynic:—"It is better to retain a few precepts of wisdom, and have them familiar, and ready for immediate use, than to learn many things, and after all, not

* Lib. iii. sect. 13.

not be able to produce them when they are needed.*” If heathen philosophers could give such lessons respecting their systems of morality, and if they found so much benefit by this method, how much more must it be our duty and advantage to draw water from the pure fountain, and have always some texts of scripture ready and applicable to every duty, temptation or trial. This David experienced: *How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea sweeter than honey to my mouth. Through thy precepts, I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way. Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.* This the Apostle recommends.—*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom.* And this our Lord has taught, by his example, when he answered the tempter—*it is written.*—

The ordinances of the sanctuary are also peculiarly calculated to promote growth in grace. It is by *the foolishness of preaching*, that, God enlarges the kingdom of his Son; by this he subdues sinners to his obedience, and by this he reclaims backsliders, builds up his people, and prepares them for glory. The word and sacraments are the green pastures into which he leads his flock;—there he meets with them, and makes them *to rest at noon.* All therefore who desire to grow in grace, must be diligent in reading the scriptures, and esteem it their duty and privilege to attend the ordinances; for these are the established means appointed of God, and there he bestows the blessing.

A *third* particular I mention as necessary to promote a growth in grace, is a practical acknowledgment of the necessity of the constant *influences of the Holy Spirit.* He dwells in his people as in his temples; he is given to them as the Spirit of adoption, to work in them the temper and confidence of children. He is the Comforter

* De beneficiis, lib. vii. cap. 1.

Comforter to lead them into the truth, and shine upon his own work in their souls. But he is especially the sanctifier, the creator of the new heart, and the promoter of holiness in all his saints. Live then under a habitual sense of your dependence upon his blessed operations. *Quench not the Spirit. Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby you are sealed unto the day of redemption.* But plead daily with the Psalmist,—*Cast me not from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. O send out thy light and thy truth, and let them lead me!*

In connection with this, it is proper next to name prayer, as an efficacious mean for growing in grace. Whatever may be said of the prayer of nature, it is certain, from scripture and experience, that grace teaches a sinner to pray from proper principles, and in a right manner. The Holy Spirit helps the infirmities of his people in this important duty. They are made to love prayer.—They delight in the exercise, because it introduces them to *the fellowship of the Father, and his son Jesus Christ*; and because it is an established rule in the dealings of God with his children, that *the Lord will be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do for them whatever he has promised.* Be much then in this duty. *Faint not; but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.*

What I shall mention as a *fifth* mean for obtaining growth in grace, is *self-examination*. A partiality for ourselves, and the deceitfulness of our hearts, will prompt us to draw favourable conclusions, and determine we are something, when perhaps we are nothing. What can be better calculated to prevent pride, and teach us our true character, than a frequent and accurate examination of ourselves? By this we may learn whether we grow or not; whether we increase in the knowledge of God
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our Saviour, love him more and serve him better, than we formerly did. Heathen moralists have been exemplary in this duty. It was an observation of Seneca, "That every day the soul should be called to render an account to itself. Sextius," says he, "did this. At the close of every day, before he retired to rest, he interrogated his soul,—Which of your lusts have you conquered this day? What vice have you resisted? In what respect are you better than you were? Can there," says the moralist, "be any thing more excellent than thus to conclude the day? How peaceable, how exalted, how free one feels, when his soul is either commended or admonished, and, as a watchman and secret censor, is conscious of its own conduct *."—Shall men under the influence of natural religion speak and act thus? And will not Christians, who are taught by a Divine revelation, and seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, under the sure guidance of the Captain of their salvation, be equally attentive to their conduct? Shall heathen be watchmen and censors, and will not believers examine themselves? Go, my brethren, and do likewise; do more than they did, and daily search into your *principles* as well as conduct, if ever you expect to grow in grace.

I might add many other excellent and approved duties which are immediately connected with growth in grace; but I have already mentioned as much as your attention and patience will bear.—I shall, therefore, only add, by barely naming them, a frequent renewal of your covenant with God in Christ;—a cheerful bearing of reproof;—and an attentive observation of the providence of God.

These, all these, in their proper time and order, are the means best calculated to promote growth in grace. *And if these things be in you and abound, they make you, that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the know-*

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* Seneca, lib. iii. de Ira, cap. 36.

ledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. If ye do these things ye shall never fail; for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

My brethren, you have seen wherein growth in grace consists, and what it implies; you have also seen the means appointed of God, and the necessity of improving these means for obtaining that invaluable blessing. The whole is practical, and many have doubtless applied the truths to their own souls, as I proceeded. Something, however, must be added to direct to the improvement which all ought to make of this important subject. From what you have heard then, learn,

First, That true religion is a real and inestimable acquisition. It is not a fiction:—It is not bigotry, superstition, or a devised fable:—It is not the mark of a mean, but of a great mind:—It is wisdom in the understanding, and rectitude in the will and affections. The man who is truly religious, is born again. He is brought out of darkness into marvellous light. The principle of holiness is implanted in his soul, and, like the returning prodigal, he comes home to his father. How great a change! What an unspeakable blessing! It is worthy of God to give, and ought to be the highest object of our desires to receive. Without this, it is impossible to enter into the kingdom of God, or experience the exercises and consolations of his people.—Religion is profitable with respect to the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come. It prompts to a zealous discharge of every duty; and, in a moral view, it renders a person greatly superior to what he was before his conversion.—Religion forms a better parent or child; a better magistrate or subject; a better master or servant; and a better friend, and member of society,

society, than without it can possibly be formed. It suppresses the baser passions, suggests the noblest views, and animates the soul to *be rich in good works*. No principles ever known among men, are so efficacious in promoting holiness, and none actually abound in good works so much as those who feel the constraining influence of the doctrines of grace.

Let the enemies of revelation, let the scoffers, therefore, learn to think and speak with reverence of what bears the stamp of Divinity, and is so essential even to the good of society. They are enemies to mankind as well as to God, who ridicule sacred things, and oppose the progress of the Gospel. You, who are of this class, may glory in your growing numbers, and by your sophistry and impudence expect to drive religion from the field; but know, that it is supported from on high; it has triumphed over much more formidable antagonists, and will live and grow against all the opposition of the gates of hell. And with respect to yourselves, be assured, that however much you may be esteemed on other accounts, yet as infidels and scoffers, you are pitied and despised by the wise and good. And know also of a certainty, that if you persevere and die in the same mind you now are, you will be forever shut out from the presence of that God whom you never loved, and from those blessings which you never relished nor sought. But should convictions of sin and guilt ever arise in your heart, you will then find that the religion of nature is not sufficient for your salvation. It may teach you something of your misery; but it is from the Gospel, that very Gospel which you now affect to despise, you can alone learn what you *must do to be saved*.

As to you who profess the religion of Christ, and receive the Bible as the standard of your faith and practice,
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what conclusion do you draw from the subject you have heard? Will mere orthodoxy in doctrines; will regularity in your conduct, or, punctuality in worship, render you truly religious? Will these produce pardon for your sins, or make you meet for glory? Alas! in all these you may abound, and yet have no love to God, or sincere submission to the Lord Jesus. To constitute vital piety, and make you a real disciple of the Redeemer, you must obtain a new heart, and by faith become united to Christ.

Shall I alarm your fears by appealing to the terrors of the law? Shall I arraign your consciences at the dread tribunal of your Judge? Shall I remind you, that you have to do with the *living God*, who is out of Christ a *consuming fire*? Shall I repeat, that without holiness no man can *see God*? I will rather at present plead with you, and, as a humble suppliant, beseech you to be reconciled to God. What will it avail to have a name to live, if yet you are dead? To toil through duties, and profess religion, without feeling its power, or sharing in its comforts? What will you be profited, if you gain the whole world, and lose you own souls? Will riches, fame or wisdom, will pleasure or any other acquisition, ultimately benefit you, if God is not your Father, if Jesus is not your Saviour, and you have not the spirit of Christ? This is the one thing needful.—Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all necessary blessings will be added unto you. O that you may hear the voice of love which invites the *wearied and heavy laden* to come; which repeats the call to all who *will*, and declares, that he who cometh, *shall in nowise be cast out*. Come in all your guilt and unworthiness, and rest not until you have obtained repentance and faith from the exalted Saviour. Both are his gift, and you lie at his mercy. This is your
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first step ; this you must experience before you can grow in grace.

Are there any present who are blessing themselves with the remembrance of some former convictions, and rest in these as sufficient and complete ? Our present subject brings a message to such. If you are contented with your past experiences, if you can sit down satisfied because you have joined with others in worship, when perhaps there was a revival of religion, if you are not troubled with your own wicked heart, and have no desire for improving in holiness, you have reason to be alarmed. The text administers no immediate comfort to you. Instead of telling you to grow in grace, I must, in faithfulness, declare to you, that there is reason to fear you never have had grace. Your work has not been in truth.—You have rested short of Christ.—You are yet in your sins.—O perish not at the threshold ! Let not the character of an almost Christian satisfy you ; but look unto Jesus.—Attend to the first works speedily, that Christ may give you life.

But, *secondly*, we have seen that wherever grace is implanted in the soul, it becomes an active principle ; it grows ; it is a fountain of living water springing up into everlasting life. Let all then, who have obtained the unspeakable happiness and honour of believing in Christ, adopt the language and sentiment of Paul. *Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect : but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*

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Have you received Christ Jesus as your Lord and Redeemer, then walk in him. Put on the whole armour of God, and learn to *fight the good fight of faith*. Give all diligence to make your calling and election sure. Lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset you, and *run with patience the race that is set before you*. Look unto Jesus, and so run that ye may obtain. So run, *not as uncertainly, so fight, not as one that beateth the air*. Strive to preserve the clearest evidences of your justification, and conscientiously improve your talents; *for to him that bath shall be given*. Remember that to glorify God by a humble and holy walk, to promote the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom, to do good to others, and fulfil all the duties of your respective stations, are the worthy objects which grace inspires. In performing these, you shine as lights in the world, you glorify your heavenly Father, and most effectually work out your own salvation. To these you are called, and these, as you grow in grace, will become more and more habitual, pleasant and easy. Be not satisfied, O believer! with your past attainments; the half has not been told you of the comforts of religion, of communion with God, and of the manifestations of Christ to the souls of his people. Be not contented with your former exertions in the service of your Lord; the half has not been done of what you ought to do, or what through grace you can perform. Look at some of your brethren who have felt the constraining power of his love, and see what they have done and suffered for their blessed Master. What zeal! What self-denial! What animated worship! What fervent love! What laborious efforts to promote the glory of God, and bear a testimony against the prevailing sins of their day and generation, have characterised many in

the church of Christ!—Go believer! go, and endeavour to imitate them. As long as life and breath remain, let all be devoted to the service of your exalted Saviour. And while gratitude unites with faith and love, you will never judge you have done too much for him, who died for you.—In choice and in affections you have left all for Jesus, and have openly associated with the people of God: you delight in their company, and are not ashamed of Christ.—Perhaps some of us present have dedicated our whole lives to his immediate service in the Gospel, and given up all the flattering prospects of wealth and preferment in the world for his sake. But we have none of us suffered persecution, or yet *resisted unto blood*. We have none of us endured what many of his dear children have frequently sustained. “As for us,” says Justin Martyr, speaking of the Christians of his day, “As for us that have entertained the religion of the holy Jesus, yourselves know very well, that there is nothing throughout the world that is able to subdue or affright us out of our profession. Nothing is more evident, than though our heads be exposed to swords and axes, our bodies fastened to the cross; though thrown to wild beasts, and harassed out with chains, fire, and all other instruments of torment, yet do we not depart from our profession. Nay, the more these things happen to us, the faster do others flock over to the name of Jesus, and become pious and devout followers of Christ.” — “Among us,” says Cyprian, “there flourishes strength of hope, firmness of faith, a mind erect amidst the ruins of a tottering age, an immoveable virtue, a patience serene and cheerful, and a soul always secure and certain of its God.” Instead of producing particular instances in which these declarations were abundantly verified, let me only repeat the noble answer which the celebrated old Polycarp made before the tribunal of the Proconsul: “These fourscore and six

years have I served Christ, and he never did me any harm, and how then can I blaspheme my Master and my Saviour!"—In this manner Christians formerly spoke and acted; and while the same Saviour, the same relation and grace remain, an obligation continues for the same sentiments, and a similar boldness and zeal.

Are any of you, while I am speaking, conscious of having proved false to your vows, and stand chargeable with backsliding instead of growing in grace? Alas, my brethren! you have robbed your souls of many comforts; you have brought reproach upon the holy religion you profess; and it is an unspeakable mercy if you have been kept back from *presumptuous sins*, and not *given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme*. But hear with gratitude and astonishment, ye backsliders! The exhortation to grow in grace is addressed also to you. The unchangeable Jesus is waiting to restore you. He is Jehovah Rophi, the Lord that healeth thee; and his language to you this day is, *Return ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings*. O let it be the language of your souls, We come unto thee compassionate Saviour! *We come unto thee, for thou art the Lord our God!* To return is your first step towards growth in grace. *Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works*. To yourselves take all the shame and guilt, and let none presume to make God the author of their sin. *Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God*. God forbid! *You have not so learned Christ*. You are convinced, that *every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lusts, and enticed, and then, when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin*. Be deeply humbled, and confess your sins to him, who has declared that he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. Though a sense of guilt may prompt you to say, *I am cast out of*

thy sight; yet look, my brethren, look again to his holy temple. Look in faith to Jesus, and you will find he is the propitiation for our sins. May the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works, to serve the living God!

But there are many of the children of God, whose souls are cast down from a failure of those vigorous exercises which they once had; and who, notwithstanding they cannot charge themselves with any positive backslidings, are yet often crying out, *O that it was with me as in days past! Will the Lord cast off for ever, will he be favourable no more! Ye tossed as with a tempest, remember that this is your infirmity!* The exercises of his people are not always of the same kind. Believers pass through various seasons. They are not forever on the mount rejoicing in the Lord, but often descend into the valley of affliction and trouble. *They sink sometimes in deep mire where there is no standing, and find themselves in a situation which may be compared to a horrible pit, and miry clay.* Be not, therefore, my brethren, disheartened. These are the footsteps of the flock. *Who then is among you that feareth the Lord; that obeyeth the voice of his servant; that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.*

But darkness and want of former comforts, is not the only case must here be attended to. A humbling sense of indwelling sin, of small progress in holiness, and continued barrenness, often discourage the saints. They see others, who perhaps began in the service of Christ much later than themselves, advancing far beyond them in knowledge, zeal and love. Upon the strictest examination, they appear to themselves, not only defective in growth,

growth, but even worse than they were at first. To these, and to similar complaints, we answer, the Lord is sovereign in his dispensations. But after all, the judgment you form of yourselves may probably not be just. Is not the depravity which you discover in your own heart; is not a view of your deficiency in love and zeal, over which you mourn, a proof of more light, and of enlarged experience? Do not these tend to humble you, and render the blessed Jesus, in all his offices, more precious? And is not this a growth in grace? Forget not, O believer! that you must decrease, and Christ must increase; and be persuaded, that by these very methods of which you complain, he is emptying you of pride and remaining confidence in your own righteousness, and thus making room for his becoming all and in all to your souls. It is thus *he leads the blind by a way they know not, and in paths that they have not known*. Fear not. Let faith and patience have their perfect work; and continue to wait upon the Lord, and you shall renew your strength.

Let those who are young disciples become animated with the exalted prospects which the service of the Redeemer opens to their view. Be assured, that faithfulness to God will bring its present reward, besides the glory which remains in reversion. Remember your relation is now changed, and you are no longer your own. You counted the cost when you gave yourselves away to Christ, and you are not to look back. Serve the Lord, then, with full purpose of heart. Flee youthful lusts, and assort with *them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart*. In every trial, in all your temptations look unto Jesus. Be not discouraged, he is faithful, he will establish you, and keep you from evil. *Little children*, says the Apostle John, *I write unto you, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake*. And surely they, to whom much is

forgiven, will love much. Indulge this love, and prove it young Christians, by keeping all his commandments. Grow in grace.

And now, believers, while we excite you all to grow in grace, you cannot fail in proportion as you understand the exhortation, to mourn before God that this is so little attended to in our day. Cherish this generous sorrow, and let it deeply affect your hearts, that such faint traces of holiness are discernible in the visible church; that so many deceive themselves and dishonour Christ, by professing his religion, while their lives and conduct announce them to be baptised infidels. But let it most affect you, that many, even of the children of Zion, appear to have departed from that strictness in piety and conscientious holiness, which always ought to characterise real believers. *Alas, how is the gold changed, and the fine gold become dim!*

Let all, who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity, often unite in prayer for a revival of religion, and plead fervently for the outpouring of his Spirit. We have been witnesses to the wonderful interpositions of Providence in the progress and issue of the late war, and the national blessings in which we are now established. *The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad.* We now wait for his salvation to Zion; for a day of power in his churches, when he shall bear witness to his own truths, and numerous converts submit to the Redeemer. Pray much for this. Your fervent intercessions will be a happy token, that the *time to favour Zion, yea the set time is come.* Pray for ministers and people, that they may seek the glory of God, and not their own honour; and that all may unite, by holiness and growth in grace, to recommend the religion of Jesus. — But whatever cloud may be still impending over Zion, and whatever

may

may be the consequences of the spirit of dissipation, error and infidelity which has gone forth, be ye, believers, faithful, and your souls *will be given you for a prey*. God will preserve and strengthen you, and *be which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ*.

You are under indispensable obligations to forsake all sin and glorify God, not only as his creatures, but especially as his children who are created anew in Christ Jesus. Often meditate upon these obligations, and remember, that *ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price, and therefore whatever others may do, ye are to glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God's*.

Strive to obtain clear apprehensions of growth in grace, that you may determine with precision wherein it consists. Despise not the day of small things. It is by little and little the enemy shall be driven out before you. Through many fallings and risings, changes and vicissitudes, your progress lies. By many sad experiences you will know that your lusts are not yet all destroyed; but by many comforting evidences you will assuredly find the promised aid of the Spirit, and the power of Christ in promoting your growth in grace.—Be afraid of sin and of temptations, but be not afraid of the cross. Trials and afflictions prove no impediment to sanctification. When sufferings produce proper exercises, they yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness; they make us sensible of our weakness; they imbitter sin, and lessen that attachment to the world which mars our progress, and hinders our growth in grace. Be then of *a good courage*, and go in the strength of the Lord. Your salvation is *nearer than when you believed*, and you may, in humble hope, look forward to your everlasting home, which is full in view;

for yet a little while, and he that shall come, will come, and will not tarry. And now the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

SER.

S E R M O N IX.

THE FOLLY AND GUILT, OF BEING
ASHAMED OF CHRIST.

BY

SAMUEL S. SMITH, D. D.

COL. N. C. V. P. et S. T. P.

MARK viii. 38.

*Whoſoever ſhall be aſhamed of me, and of my words, in
this adulterous and finful generation, of him alſo ſhall
the Son of Man be aſhamed, when he cometh in the glory
of his Father, and with the holy Angels.*

TO perform our duty, and then without oſtentation
to avow it, is our moſt honourable and uſeful cha-
racter. It is fulfilling the firſt law of our nature, and
extending the prevalence of religion and virtue in the
world, by the influence of our example. To be *aſhamed*
of our duty is to be aſhamed of our glory. To acknow-
ledge its obligation in ſecret, and yet diſguiſe it before
men, diſcovers a weakneſs and duplicity of mind, that is
no leſs inconſiſtent with dignity than with piety.

The

The sentiment of *shame* that gives to the opinion of others so great authority over the mind, is originally a wise and excellent law of nature. But the depravity of man hath perverted the best principles, and changed the most ingenuous feelings of the heart into ministers of sin. Great crimes are evidently opposed to the interests of society, and therefore they are condemned by public opinion.—The depravity of the human heart is equally opposed to the spirit of true Religion, and therefore, the manners, and at least the ostensible opinions of the world, contradict the purity and simplicity of the Gospel. The one opposes vice in the extreme, the other tends to encourage vice in a certain degree.

The world hath so accommodated its conversation, its wit, and its opinions to its manners, that men in the cause of piety, are afraid of incurring its censure or contempt. They want courage to oppose the stream of custom,—they renounce their duty in compliance with fashionable vice, or they conceal their inward reverence for it, and against their conviction they live like the world.

To be ashamed of Christ is a sin that may be considered in a variety of lights. Our Saviour, in pronouncing this sentence, had probably an immediate view to the testimony which his disciples would be called to bear to his name, before the tribunals of their unrighteous judges, where the splendour of courts, the scoffs of enemies, the ignominy of punishments, and the humble and unfriended condition of the first Christians, would all contribute to subdue their minds, to make them ashamed of their Master's cross, and to deprive them of the courage necessary to profess, or to suffer for his despised cause.—Honour elevates the mind and gives fortitude to the weak. Shame is an enfeebling principle that takes even from the brave the confidence necessary to avow truth, and the firmness
necessary

necessary to endure suffering.—Indeed, to be *ashamed* of Christ and to *deny* him are so intimately connected, as cause and effect, that St Matthew, in expressing this declaration of our Saviour, says, Whosoever shall *deny* me before men, him will I also *deny* before my Father who is in heaven.

Through the goodness of God we are not exposed to persecution, but living in an age in which custom, in which the powers of wit and ridicule, in which the honours of society, and in which even reason and philosophy have been engaged on the side of vice, we are liable to disguise the truths of the Gospel, and to be ashamed of Christ, with a more criminal weakness than they who suffered their constancy to be shaken by the majesty of tribunals, and the terror of flames.

It is this evil which I propose from the text to explain and condemn.

I. By pointing out what is implied in being ashamed of Christ, and of his words.

II. By demonstrating its folly and its guilt.

I. In pointing out what is implied in being ashamed of Christ, and of his words, I shall treat of the *sentiment* of shame directly,—and unfold some of its principal *causes*,—and its *consequences*, as they affect the profession of Religion.

1. In the first place, the *sentiment* of shame.—This, like other simple feelings and emotions of the human mind, cannot be easily understood, except by exciting the perception, and calling to mind the occasions on which we have most sensibly felt its constraints.—Let us recollect those seasons in which a sinful regard to the observation

tion of men has tempted us to decline the duty to which we have been urged by our own hearts,—or in which we have gone into criminal compliances with the world, through a weakness of mind that was unable to support the presence, or to contradict the opinions of our fellow sinners. Let young persons, particularly recollect their fears, lest it should be known that they worship God, and pay to the Creator the first duty of a creature.—Recollect what it is that sometimes clothes you with a light and thoughtless air in the house of God, afraid to be serious, lest you should appear too much to believe the gospel, or to be affected by its truths. When at any time the Divine word begins to seize upon your hearts, what is it that excites you to shake off the conviction? And when almost persuaded to be a Christian, what withholds you from being persuaded altogether?—It is *shame*. You are afraid the world will remark it,—the world, whose presence weighs more with you than the authority of an invisible Deity. If you feel the compunctions of repentance, you fear lest they should be imputed to melancholy or to weakness. If you perceive the duty and importance of making salvation your first care, and of honouring your Saviour by a public profession of his name, yet you want the necessary resolution to encounter the world,—to meet the sneers of your companions;—their looks of suspicion, their hints of hypocrisy, their presages of inconstancy.—Thus may every hearer understand this sentiment, by recalling to mind the occasions on which he has felt it, and on which it has checked his desires, or destroyed his resolutions of duty.

2. I shall further illustrate it, by pointing out some of its principal *causes*. These may be reduced to the three that follow,—the pain of singularity,—the power of ridicule,—the want of sincerity.

Singularity

Singularity is always painful to an ingenuous mind. It seems to hold out as exceptions from the general law of human nature,—as insensible to its feelings,—and worthy neither of the affections nor of the confidence of mankind. Singularity always attracts the censure of the world; or, by contradicting general practice or opinions, it invites contempt. The public manners have numbers on their side, sufficient to brand with ignominy whatever, by differing from them, implies their condemnation. Superstition, contraction of sentiment, weakness of mind, illiberality of heart, are the mildest reproaches that fashionable dissipation bestows on piety that dares to be singular. Wealth and power, objects before which the human mind is prone to bow, being too often on the side of vicious fashion, give it great advantage in establishing wrong ideas of honour and disgrace. And because the multitude of men of science, like the vulgar multitude, are frequently on the same interests, even philosophy and wit have been pressed into its service by these its obedient sons. To withstand so many formidable enemies is an arduous task, even for confirmed virtue. Little is the wonder then, if first resolutions in Religion should be shaken by them; and if the young should sometimes not have fortitude to bear up against them. To be singular in piety, is to dare incur contempt for the despised cross. A hard sacrifice this for human pride! and especially for juvenile virtue!—Many more are found who are ready to forsake the Saviour, than who have firmness of mind sufficient to overcome the constraints of a false shame. Imperious fashion, both in conduct and opinion, will for ever sway the worldly heart. To rise above its influence requires an extraordinary zeal in Religion that seems to annihilate the temptations of the world, or a long and respected character in Religion,
that

that gives a man authority over his own actions. But in the commencement of a religious life, and before a character in piety hath become appropriated and sacred for a man to enter into the society of his companions with reserve,—to go with it only a certain length,—to seem to enjoy it with constraint,—to reproach them by more severe and corrected morals,—and to incur their suspicion, obloquy or contempt, requires uncommon prudence and uncommon fortitude.—How often does the dismaying power of shame subdue the heart before so many difficulties!

Another source of false shame is found in the *power of ridicule*.

Ridicule is perhaps the severest assault which a man about to enter upon duty is called to sustain. It is apt to dismay and humble him much more than the coolness of contempt, or the violence of power. So sensible of its force are some infidels, that with this weapon alone do they attack Christianity, which they have so long in vain assailed by reason. It is a species of attack which every man can use against Religion, because all can laugh, though few can reason. It can be used against Religion with peculiar success, because its perfections are often invisible to sense, or withdrawn from the view; while the imperfections of its professors, which are mistaken for it, are obvious to every eye.—The *saints*!—the *hypocrites*!—the *weak fools*!—are titles that will furnish abundant sources of amusement to those who mistake *names* for *characters*, and *laughter* for *wit*: And when other matter fails, mimicry, the lowest species of ridicule, comes in with a thousand malicious and false additions, to dress out the last scenes of impious diversion. The wise and experienced Christian arrives at length to feel his superiority over these ludicrous attacks;—but the young and inexperienced

inexperienced find them almost irresistible. They feel the humiliating contempt of laughter,—they are degraded in their own esteem,—ridicule dismays them,—a senseless smile subdues their hearts,—and before a sinful generation they are *ashamed of Christ, and of his words*.

In the consciousness of *want of sincerity*, we find another cause of that weak shame which is prone to deny or to disguise our reverence for Religion.

Pretences to an unsupported character are in the highest degree dishonourable and reproachful. The world that differs in so many things from the disciples of Christ, agrees with them in condemning *visible hypocrisy*. Many young persons, dreading the contempt that is due to this character, are deterred from making a declared choice of Religion. Conscious that a conduct grave, devout and holy, should accompany the profession of piety, and fearing lest they want that sincere and courageous zeal, which will enable them to make such a resolute and conspicuous change of life, as becomes the followers of Christ, they decline to appear openly for his cause; they are afraid of discovering for it that reverence and attachment which they really feel, lest they should not be able to support the profession with uniformity and consistency. —Ah! my brethren, if our hearts were sincere, the importance and glory of Divine things would at once decide our choice, and overcome the apprehensions of being ever willing to sacrifice them to worldly interests, or to worldly pleasures; to the solicitations or the sneers of men. But insincerity fears the reproach of hypocrisy more than it fears hypocrisy itself;—insincerity shrinks from the opinion of a worm, but does not tremble before the justice of the Creator:—Insincerity is ashamed of our glory in the midst of sinners who are for ever glorying in their shame!

3. The consideration of the *effects*, as well as the *causes* of this principle, will assist in explaining its nature.

One of the most certain consequences of being ashamed of duty, is to *lead to boldness and audacity in vice*. Shame is, perhaps, the evidence of a middle character, neither virtuous nor abandoned. It is always accompanied with some remaining reverence for God. But, judging from the licentious face of the world, that other sinners are not subject to the same constraints, it blushes for this sentiment, as for a weakness. Endeavouring to cover its belief, or its fears, it assumes a greater shew of infidelity and license than perhaps is real. It soon affects to talk in the style of the world,—to divert itself with serious persons, and at length with serious things;—it gives hints of libertinism, which it represents as superior to vulgar prejudice—it sometimes pushes these appearances farther than would be necessary, if men were really infidels, to secure to themselves, without controversy, that honourable character. But conscious insincerity urges them to extremes to cover its own deceptions. And men being prone to form their opinions, no less than to derive their feelings from sympathy, these mutual appearances contribute to create at length, that vice and infidelity to which all, in the beginning only pretend. It is besides, a principle of human nature, that pretence itself will ultimately form those dispositions and habits, which it continues to affect.

But if shame more *modestly* resolves not to renounce but to *postpone* the care of our salvation, is there not reason to fear, that this unhappy resolution will eventually come to the same issue? Need I repeat in this assembly the usual fruits of delay? Ah! my brethren, men always find the same reasons for delaying—and those who, through a false shame and fear of the world, postpone their

their duty, may usually be considered, in effect, as *resolving to renounce it*.

If conscience, however, or if other motives prevail with some men, who are notwithstanding under the influence of a criminal *shame*, openly to acknowledge their Saviour; will it not often corrupt the principles, and pervert the spirit of religion? They study to accommodate their spirit and principles to the opinions and manners of the world, that the world, seeing nothing in their piety but its *own image*, may cease to reproach them. Piety becomes with them prudential maxims of behaviour. The distinguishing doctrines of the gospel, the denial of ourselves, the regeneration of the heart, and spirituality of life, are little to be observed in persons who are afraid of nothing so much as of being remarked for religious singularity, and who aim no higher than to pay the same ceremonious respect to the church, which they do to the world. Lest their piety should be reproached as superstition, they are careful perhaps to make it understood, that they do not place too high a value on the public institutions of religion. Lest it should be derided as enthusiasm, do they not banish from their devotion *all appearances of zeal*? Lest they should incur the imputation of a narrow or illiberal mind, do they not often run so far into the principles and manners of a dissolute age, that hardly can you discern that they are the *friends of religion*?

Having thus far considered what is implied in being "ashamed of Christ, and of his words,"—I proceed,

II. To shew its *folly* and its *guilt*.—*Of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed.*

The *folly* and the *guilt* of this vice are reciprocal. They mutually contribute to illustrate and aggravate each other. In this connection, its *folly* deserves, in the

first place, to be considered with the most serious attention.—It consists,

1. In being ashamed of our true glory.
2. In hoping to avoid, by renouncing religion, an evil which cannot be shunned among men, I mean detraction and ridicule.
3. In fearing an imaginary evil, that is, reproach for real virtue and piety.
4. And finally, in exposing ourselves to infinite danger, for the sake of covering a fruitless deception.

1. It consists in the first place, in being ashamed of our true glory.

What is the *biggest glory* of man?—Whether we consider ourselves as creatures, as sinners to be redeemed, or as moral agents, the most important lights in which we can be viewed, our glory and our duty are the same.—Obedience to the Creator, gratitude to the Saviour, and conformity to the laws of our nature.

If God is our parent, and the author of our being, doth not every idea of duty and of honour require us to worship him, and publicly to claim our relation to him? On the worthy and obedient child, the virtues of the parent are reflected, and every related object derives a splendor from the dignity of the principal. But examine all the things on earth, that are the subjects of human boasting, and are they not in his presence *less than nothing and vanity*?—O God! the universal Father!—Origin of Being!—Fountain of good!—in union to thee—in conformity to thine image—in obedience to thy will, consists the glory of the rational and moral nature! To be ashamed of thee, is not the absurdity only, but the madness of human folly!

Gratitude

Gratitude to the Saviour is the second duty, and the second honour of man. To shew a defect of gratitude where it is justly due, is a decisive proof of a degenerate and ignoble mind. But the greatness and condescension of the Redeemer, the meanness and the guilt of man, concur in this case, to impose a boundless claim on our gratitude and love. Is it not our true glory, my brethren, to feel with all their force the infinite obligations created by redemption?—Is it not our glory to acknowledge them with warmer gratitude, in proportion as they are forgotten or neglected by the world?—Yes, this is the dictate of a true, a generous, a grateful, as well as pious heart.

Lastly, the honour of man consists in *fulfilling the end of our being*, which is the will of God. But this *weak principle* which makes him desert his duty, changes at the same time, and degrades his rational and moral nature, and sinks them from their original and native glory; the one to a resemblance of brutal natures, the other to an image of infernal spirits.—O man! ambitious of glory! afraid of nothing so much as of disgrace! Unwise and foolish man! thou art ashamed of thy glory! and thou gloriest in thy shame!

2. The *folly* of being ashamed of our duty, appears, in the next place, in vainly hoping to avoid, by renouncing religion, an evil which cannot be shunned among men; I mean detraction and ridicule.

What is the world but a vast theatre, where envy and malice are perpetually sharpening the tongues and the wit of men against each other? What is half the intercourse of life but a scene of obloquy and sneer, where the characters of the absent are the constant sacrifice to the vanity of the present? Wherever you have rivals, and that is wherever you have acquaintance of the same

sex, or age, or profession with yourself, you find those whose weak minds have no other means of exalting themselves, but by depressing you. Change then your life—you only change the subject of discourse. You cannot gain by continuing of the party of sinners, what you fear to lose by embracing the cause of religion,—their friendship or their good opinion. And why should you fear, in the service of God alone, an evil to which you must be equally, or even more exposed, by remaining in the interests of the world?—I say more exposed; for it greatly augments the folly of this sin.

3. In the next place; that while it incurs *a real*, it flies from *an imaginary evil*. It fears reproach for religion, when, in reality, *the world has no reproach to make*; when, instead of despising, *it respects the beautiful and supported character of piety*.

Wisdom and goodness, rightly understood, can never be the objects of ridicule or censure. They vindicate themselves to the judgment and conscience, even of the vicious. Misrepresentation, to which an honest mind should ever be superior, is here the only ground of reproach. And what can even misrepresentation allege?—That, in youth, it is an affectation of wisdom and virtue above your companions and above your years!—Alas! can any age be too early to be wise, and to seek for real and durable felicity?—If the multitude of your companions afford few examples of piety, is it not the greater honour to rise to a degree of wisdom, rarely attained even in mature life, and at an age in which we think it much if you learn with docility, to be able already to give an example worthy of imitation?—Will the world busy itself to find out false motives for your change? Let such malice serve only to disgust you the more with a world, the true character of which you are now just beginning

to

to discern.—Will they say with a sneer, *the saints! the hypocrites! the weak fools! Ah! this zeal will not last long!*—Let such ungenerous insults only determine your resolution more firmly to support the dignity of religion, by the integrity of your conduct, and by perseverance in virtue. If you do thus, be assured that the world itself, after proving your sincerity, and spending its first resentments upon you for having forsaken its party, will regard you with reverence and esteem. It is not indeed religion, but insincerity and hypocrisy they despise. If then you would silence obloquy, and obtain an honourable place in their hearts, be not ashamed of the doctrines of Christ. But you must be careful to mix with your religion nothing weak or superstitious; nothing libertine or worldly. Do not resemble too much the man of the world. *It is their own image which they despise in a Christian. Persevere in the path of duty.* They will convert contempt or hatred into veneration; they will applaud your resolution; they will envy your destiny; and if they cannot bring their lives to resemble you, they will *secretly sigh* that their end may be like yours.

4. The folly of this evil consists, in the last place, in its exposing us to *infinite danger*, for the sake of covering a *fruitless deception*.

Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, said the Saviour, *of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed.*—Wo to that man, of whom the Son shall be ashamed! God, when offended, might be reconciled through his atonement. But, when the Saviour is rejected, *there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins.*

Is this the issue of being ashamed of the gospel?—Is this the reward of that frivolous honour which we would preserve in the opinion of a corrupted world, by renouncing virtue?—Is this the fruit of that criminal deception

which we strive to maintain by unworthy pretences against the struggling sense of inward duty?—do we derive from it even present gain, to make a momentary compensation for the *eternal loss*? No, *worldly* reputation, and interest are, when rightly considered, *in favour of religion*. But when the *soul*, when the *hopes of salvation*, when the *judgment of God*, are put in the balance against a *slander*, a *sneer*, a *suspicion*, a *look* of miserable mortals, and outweighed—Oh! infinite folly! My brethren, eternity alone can disclose it in its full magnitude; when we shall see, in the dreadful light of everlasting burnings, the vanity of human opinion, and all the terrors of that denunciation, *of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed*.

Secondly, Having endeavoured, in few words, to illustrate *the folly* of being ashamed of religion, I shall, with equal brevity, illustrate *its guilt*. Its guilt consists in exalting the authority of man above the glory of God; in ingratitude to him, who was not ashamed of us; and in promoting vice by the pernicious influence of our example.

1. In exalting the authority of man above the glory of God.

His *infinite perfection*, independently on his rights as our Creator, has a supreme claim to our adoration and love. He is infinitely *more worthy* than any of his creatures, of the fervent and entire devotion of our hearts. He who hath created the powers of understanding and enjoyment, is able to fill them with consummate and eternal consolations. Not to love him, therefore, not to make his glory predominant over all other objects, is an evidence that the heart is blind to moral beauty, and corrupted in all its affections. But to make man the arbiter of our duty to God, to make the Divine Glory stoop to the pleasure or opinion of a miserable worm, is a crime

crime beyond expression. Its malignity is to be estimated from the perfection of Him who is offended; and, like that, it is infinite.

2. The guilt of this sin consists, in the next place, in ingratitude to Him who was not ashamed of us.

Ingratitude to a benefactor is among the most detested vices. If the ingratitude of men, for the blessings of salvation, strikes us with less horror than other examples of this sin, it is because *we* are involved in the common crime—it is because we do not discern in the light of faith, the infinite distance between the Creator and the creature.—But when he descends from his eternal throne—when the incarnate Deity submits to suffer—when the Divine Glory was not ashamed of human weakness, that sinners should be ashamed of him—be astonished O heavens, at this! and tremble thou earth, who bearest in thy bosom such guilt!

It has sometimes been asked by those who are not willing to make great sacrifices, whether we may not acquit ourselves of duty in secret, without exposing our profession to the view of those who would *insult or deride it*?—I answer, No.—Sincerity glories in its object: And when God is the object, the soul, occupied in the blessedness of its portion, forgets in a measure the applause or censure of the world—his glory will be a sufficient portion when the world frowns—the sense of his love will support the heart against the fear of its reproach. *Shame* to that worldly prudence that is ashamed of its God!

Shall sin, the disgrace of our nature, walk among us with elevated and impudent forehead?—And shall religion, the glory of the reasonable soul, blush and retire, lest the profane eyes of men, dazzled with its beauty, should not be able to endure the sight.

3. Its guilt consists, in the last place, in promoting vice by the pernicious influence of our example.

Example is contagious, and the world becomes more corrupted from the vice that is already in it. To decline the profession of religion through false shame, is, in some respects, more injurious to the interests of virtue in the world, than open impiety. This sometimes prevents imitation, by a certain horror at its enormity.—That, by preserving greater decency, more effectually insinuates its poison. Your example proclaims your unbelief, or your contempt of the gospel; and invites others to receive it with incredulity, or to treat it with scorn. In account of the Divine Justice, *the depravity and perhaps the perdition of many sinners*, shall be charged to that criminal shame which alienates you from the life of God, *and shall go to augment your guilt.*

In the *conclusion* of this discourse, permit me to remark, that although Divine grace alone can effectually secure the heart, and raise it above the influence of a false and unholy shame; yet it will greatly contribute to this happy effect, to have early established just ideas of honour and shame, by a well directed education. It is of great importance, in the beginning of life, to pre-occupy the mind by good impressions—to teach it to reverence God, before it has yet seen the beauties of holiness—to *honour*, before it has learned to *love* religion—and to prepare it to *despise* before it has arrived to *detest* the vices and the follies of the world. It is of the greater importance, because our habits and opinions are constantly and imperceptibly forming, by all that we see and hear. If religion does not early impart such as are rational and just, the world will necessarily prepossess the mind with such as are pernicious and false. False shame will withhold it
from

from the influence of piety—false honour will raise up within it the most dangerous enemies to salvation.

Let parents and instructors, therefore, be diligent to discharge their duty with fidelity to the rising generation. The most happy fruits will reward your prudent and honest zeal. Reflect what advantages you enjoy, when you plead the cause of piety against vice, and of heaven against the world. What can be more glorious than the service of the King of kings? What more great and worthy than virtue, which brings to perfection all the best and noblest principles of human nature? Religion is the true glory as well as happiness of man. It is sin only that is his real shame.—It is filled, besides, with unspeakable danger, and is speedily tending to eternal ruin.

Suffer me to extend a little this idea.—It is strongly implied in the expression of our Saviour, *of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels.* All miseries are included in this threatening.—When God condescends to treat the sinner in this language of sarcastic contempt, it strikes me as the most fearful denunciation of Divine vengeance. Other threatenings seem more definitely to mark their penalties: This presents nothing distinctly to the imagination, but holds up every thing most terrible to our fears.—Shall I call up to view the last tribunal? the heavens on fire; the earth shaken and moved out of its place; the elements melting with fervent heat before the wrath of God and of the Lamb?—Shall I speak of *Tophet* that is ordained of old, the pile whereof is fire and much wood; and the breath of the Lord as a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it? And shall I not say, after all, that his most fearful sentence is, “*of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed?*”—This is indignant justice, heightened by contempt. The flames of anger may consume the
sinner

finer—shame will bury him for ever from his sight.—
What! banished from thy sight, O merciful Saviour of
men! This is indeed the blackness of everlasting dark-
ness!

Let those unhappy men who are ashamed of Christ
and of his words, deeply reflect on this dreadful destiny!
—To persuade you to this wise and necessary resolution,
is the whole object of the present discourse. May the
Spirit of God add to these reflections his own evidence,
and his almighty energy! May he impart to us a wise
estimate of eternity and time! of the opinions of men,
and the approbation of God!—And now to the King
eternal, immortal, and invisible, be rendered, through
Jesus Christ, all honour, glory and praise, from all on
earth, and all in heaven! Amen.

S E R.

S E R M O N X.

ON THE FORGIVENESS OF INJURIES.

BY

SAMUEL S. SMITH, D.D.

COL. N. C. V. P. et S. T. P.

MATT. VI. 14.

*If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father
will also forgive you.*

THE forgiveness of injuries, which is among the most important duties of morals, and to which mankind have always submitted with so much reluctance, is here enforced by our Saviour with the highest sanction of religion. In inculcating this great law, he proposes the mercy of God to our imitation, he recalls to memory our offences against him, that this humiliating reflection may render us mild and indulgent to those who have offended us.—And he touches the deepest springs of interest, by making our own pardon from God depend on the spirit with which we treat others.

Philosophy

Philosophy has often recommended the contempt, but rarely the forgiveness of injuries. It is a doctrine not indeed above the reach of reason; but reason is too weak to establish it as a general principle of action. It required the authority of a Divine Legislator to enforce the duty in this extent, on the pride, or the meanness of mankind.

To illustrate this duty is the object of the following discourse.—With this view, I propose to explain its nature and extent,—and to shew that it is founded in the justest reason.

I. I beg your attention, therefore, in the first place, while I endeavour to illustrate the nature and extent of this duty.

The first impulse usually which men feel on receiving an injury, is to revenge. This dark and furious passion is always violent and extreme in its purposes, and is prone to justify its excesses, by representing its object in a criminal and odious light. It outrages the Divine Spirit of charity, and tends to rend asunder those amiable and happy ties, by which God would unite society together, and connect man with man. To prevent or to correct these disorders, Christianity hath promulged the law of forgiveness. This law comprehends the following great principles of duty,—to love our enemies,—and to return good for evil.

1. To love our enemies.—No injury can cancel that original obligation that lies on all mankind to love one another. Derived from one origin, partaking of one nature, united in the same interests, and heirs of the same hopes, they are connected by so many and such powerful ties, that no cause can be sufficient entirely to dissolve them, or to justify an unforgiving temper. If
every

every man should conceive himself entitled to repay injustice with hatred, would not that amiable spirit be destroyed which was intended to unite the world together, and the family of God be rent with irreconcilable diffensions? Hence he requires us to love even our enemies,—to regard them as brethren,—to sympathise with their distress,—to find apologies for their rash and mistaken resentments,—and to pity those whose injuries are more pernicious to themselves than to us.

This spirit, when it is sincere, will not be restrained to those emotions and wishes of a good and benevolent heart, that are confined within itself. It will seek every prudent and practicable mean of reconciliation. It is the law of Christ, *If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go, first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.*—A good and delicate mind will feel exquisite pain in having given even involuntary offence. If innocent, it will be solicitous to make those explanations that may be necessary to remove improper prejudices from a brother's breast. Or, if through prepossession, or the transports of passion, it hath given him real cause of umbrage, it will not be too haughty to make the just and reasonable concessions. Nay, where the heart of a brother is to be regained, a good man will not too rigorously examine or contend for his own rights;—he will display a certain generosity in his advances, which is the dictate of a benevolent and noble mind, conscious of the purest intentions.

2. To forgive injuries, is not only *to love our enemies*, but, *to return good for evil.*—*Bless those who curse you, saith Christ, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who despitefully use you, and persecute you. If thine enemy*

enemy hunger feed him, if he thirst give him drink ; for, in so doing, thou wilt heap coals of fire on his head,—that is, thou wilt either reclaim him by the painful conviction of his rashness and guilt ; or thou wilt dissolve his heart, if he hath yet a heart to be dissolved, by the warm persuasion of your goodness. If there be a way in which you can render him essential service,—by speaking well of the deserving parts of his character,—by drawing a discreet veil over his foibles,—by generously producing his virtues to light,—or by advancing his fortunes, you will not only fulfil an elevated duty of religion, but probably attach him for ever as an useful friend.

It may be demanded, perhaps, whether this doctrine of love to our enemies, requires such reliance on their virtue, and such confidence in the appearances of reconciliation, as might put us too much in their power if they were designing and insincere.—By no means.—Piety is not inconsistent with prudence, nor the most warm and generous charity with those precautions that are necessary for our safety. You may pity, you may assist, you may forgive, you may love an enemy before you confide in him. Experience is necessary to lay a just and solid foundation for trust. Your own duty is certain and clear ;—his character may still be dubious. It requires time and variety of proof to assure us sufficiently of the integrity and goodness of others: A heart prompted by warm benevolence, and at the same time under the direction of a sound understanding, will be, on this subject, the best interpreter of the divine law.

It may serve, however, farther to illustrate the nature and extent of this duty, to point out the false principles on which the reconciliations of men often turn, after they have been once embroiled, and the false substitutions that are often made in the room of the forgiveness of injuries.

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False principles of reconciliation are numerous and various. We see it sometimes accomplished with difficulty by the assiduity and management of common friends, who are offended at the excesses to which it is carried, or afflicted at the derangement it occasions in the circle of their society. The parties, perhaps fatigued with their importunity, or ashamed of their own obstinacy, yield at length to their remonstrances.—But observe with what reluctance they come together! what mutual coldness and distrust they discover! how many punctilios must be adjusted! how many explanations must be made! how many compromises must be attempted, evidently calculated to save a false idea of honour, and to evade the genuine spirit of evangelical reconciliation! Sometimes it is sought merely as a cover from the perpetual shafts of obloquy, or to avoid the anxiety and disgrace of eternal self-vindication and recrimination.—Sometimes to save ourselves the irksomeness of shunning, or the awkwardness of meeting in the same companies. How often, in the numerous and capricious changes of party of every kind, does an unexpected coincidence of interest reunite men whom an accidental opposition had divided? How often hath the dishonour of becoming the subjects of public satire or mirth, induced them to overcome or restrain their passions? And a few, perhaps, affecting the glory of moderation, or of magnanimity, have endeavoured not so much to forgive as to shew a superiority to injuries.

These principles contribute to preserve a certain degree of order and union in human society; but they do not rise to that elevation and purity which is required by the gospel. They are imitations of Religion, not its genuine spirit,—and although they may be employed as useful auxiliaries of piety, yet, if they are the sole principles of action, their value is destroyed by the selfishness
and

and pride with which they are accompanied. You widely mistake if, in consequence of a reconciliation that has proceeded upon these grounds, you imagine you have forgiven your brother, or have fulfilled the views of the law. The world, that judges with more impartiality, sees you are not friends. It sees in your conversation, in your conduct, in your whole manner, a secret coldness and alienation from him that is not consistent with the meekness, the benevolence, and the disinterested spirit of this duty.—You should forgive for no oblique or selfish views,—you should forgive from the principle of charity,—you should forgive for the love of God,—you should forgive, because you need to be forgiven.

I shall now illustrate this duty farther, by considering, in another view, the false substitutions that are often made in the room of the forgiveness of injuries.

The first that I mention is a certain apathy of mind that hath ceased to feel the emotions of resentment, not because the injury is forgiven, but because time has abated our sensibility. My brethren, this partakes nothing of the vivacity of true charity. Charity is a warm and active principle. It embraces a forgiven enemy like a reconciled brother,—and an enemy who refuses to be reconciled, it regards with that spirit of meekness and benediction which can flow only from a heart touched and animated with the love of God.

Another substitute is a reconciliation merely ostensible, and a return to the exterior decencies of society, while a warm remembrance of the injury is still cherished in the breast.

It is not uncommon to say, I forgive him, but he has no reason hereafter to *rely* upon my friendship. My brethren, this hint is too insignificant. We discern in it the evident symptoms of an alienated mind. Is this to forgive?

give? Does love thus studiously cherish the memory of an offence? Does the meek temper of forgiveness thus swell the heart with a proud resentment? True forgiveness implies much more than a constrained and artificial submission to the exterior decencies of life. It is a principle that unites the hearts of men by the inward and powerful cement of Divine love, and not their persons merely by the loose and vulgar ties of ordinary association.

Another and much more unjustifiable substitute for this duty, is a resolution, indeed, not to prosecute an open and public revenge, but accompanied at the same time with a purpose to avoid, towards the offender, all the common civilities of life.

Men who act on this principle seldom mollify their resentments so far as to submit to a formal reconciliation. Yet because an unforgiving temper is condemned by religion, and still more because it is odious to the world, they profess to forgive when they mean only they will not prosecute their rage to extremes. But they refuse to see their enemy,—they shun the companies he is known to frequent. Wherefore? Because his presence might excite painful recollections, or create an embarrassment that would destroy the pleasure of society. My brethren, let the common sense of mankind decide upon this question. Can we have forgiven our brother, if we exclude him from our sight? If his presence still irritates? If it recalls ideas that should be forgotten? If it awakens emotions that should be composed by the spirit of love?—Certainly not.

The last substitute which I shall mention for the *forgiveness*, is the *contempt* of injuries.

A man is so closely connected with his actions, that it is difficult to despise his vices, which is permitted by religion,

ligion, without despising his person, which is not permitted. The sentiment of superiority to an unworthy act too easily degenerates, in a common mind, into improper pride. And so foreign from true charity is all pride and haughtiness of spirit, and so difficult is it not to involve the person in our idea with his character or cause, that it is safest perhaps for a Christian to regard even the vices of others with pity, rather than with contempt.

Having thus far endeavoured to explain the nature and extent of forgiving injuries, and pointed out the wrong conceptions which are entertained of it by mankind, both in the improper principles of their reconciliations, and in the false substitutions which they are prone to make in the room of this duty.—I proceed now,

II. To illustrate its foundation in reason, as well as in the command of the Saviour.

This may be done from a double source of argument,—from the excellence and amiableness of the disposition from which this virtue is derived,—and from the insufficiency of the causes on which revenge is justified.

1. In the first place, from the excellence and amiableness of the disposition from which this virtue is derived.—It contains a high and general philanthropy, which is a sweet and elevated affection;—it contains the love of our enemies, which is a generous principle;—it will attract respect and honour from the world;—and finally, it is the most perfect resemblance of that attribute in the Deity which is the most interesting to man.

1. It contains a high and general philanthropy, which is a sweet and elevated affection.

Love is the highest principle of union among all sensible beings. Its exercise is always accompanied with pleasure,

pleasure, and with the consciousness of its excellence. The common proverb, that revenge is sweet, is a maxim of passion, not of reason. And, like most other strong and sudden dictates of the passions, it is false. Are not the plans of revenge filled with anxiety and pain? Is not their execution accompanied with the bitterness of undisguised rage, or the baseness of secret treachery? Doth it not, when most successful, recoil in its effects upon ourselves, either from the resentment of the world, or from the reflections of our own breasts? And doth it not, when unsuccessful, render us the victims of our own impetuosity, and pride, and involve us in a succession of hostilities, and a tempest of hateful passions, that destroy at once our security and our peace!—No, revenge is not sweet;—it imbitters our enjoyments;—it incurs the hatred and opposition of mankind;—and, even in our own view, degrades us in the moments of calm recollection. On the other hand, the mild and heavenly principle of universal love, exalts us in our own esteem.—It diffuses a divine sweetness through the breast, and spreads tranquillity over the whole scene of life;—it escapes injury by avoiding offence,—and tends to render all men our friends by being ourselves the friends of all. Such is the genuine principle of forgiveness;—such is its dignity and happiness;—and the reasonableness of the duty becomes evident, from the excellence of its source.

2. It contains, in the next place, the love of our enemies, which is a noble and generous affection.

Whatever excellence or beauty there is in that general philanthropy that unites us to mankind, it is greatly increased by embracing our enemies. There is a generosity in forgiving an enemy that exalts the action. There is a heroism in being superior to injury, that cannot be acquired by the boldest and most successful efforts of re-

venge.—What is an enemy?—One who has treated you with injustice;—who has attacked your interests;—who has attempted to blast your reputation;—who has touched you in those points that are most tender and dear to an honest and feeling mind.—What can be more great and elevated than that divine charity which enables us to forgive him? Doth it not display a fortitude that disdains to fear? or a consciousness of innocence that cannot eventually distrust the justice of the world?—Or, is it not at least the fruit of penitent humility, that forgets *his* injury in the self-reproaches which returning virtue always makes to our *own* past folly?—Reproaches which are the certain indication of a worthy and ingenuous mind.

But, apart from these considerations, our enemies themselves have some claim to our regard, for the benefits we may derive from them. Friends are too tender to our foibles. Flatterers, while they soothe, beguile, and often do us an essential injury, by cherishing a false vanity, and a contemptuous indifference to the opinion of the world. Frequently our imperfections are first learned from our enemies. And although they may be magnified by unfriendly passions; yet even malevolence has usually some ground on which it raises its exaggerated pictures. A wise man, by prudently attending to its censures, may learn to correct his errors, and to perfect his virtues. And the laudable desire of reforming every fault, and a generous wish of perfecting the character, may contribute, in such a mind, to extinguish resentment, by the obligation which it feels, even to an enemy.

3. This spirit, in the next place, is not only honourable in itself, but it will attract respect and honour from the world.

No, reply the passionate advocates for the manners of the world, such mildness and forbearance will only invite injuries,

injuries, and will certainly degrade us in the public opinion. It is contrary to the established maxims of honour; and a man is no longer well received if he has forfeited his character in so delicate a point. My brethren, let me beg your patience a moment, while I combat the truth of these remarks; at least so far as they regard a good man, who has acquired an established character for piety and prudence, who is cautious of giving offence, and who is ready to acknowledge his fault, if he has inadvertently suffered himself to be betrayed by his passion. We rarely see examples of that innate and inveterate malice which will pursue benevolent worth of this kind, with unrelenting injustice. The vicious world itself respects goodness that is supported with dignity. If there are a few instances of such atrocious spirits, their own violence disgraces themselves, and saves the reputation of a worthy character. Even in that point, in which modern manners have peculiarly placed the idea of honour, more real glory, and more public esteem will follow from forgiving than revenging affronts. That affectation of meekness, indeed, which flows from pusillanimity, is a contemptible character.—It is easily distinguishable from the mild and benevolent temper of the Gospel, which *may* be associated with the highest bravery. And much of the reproach which has been poured upon those who, in the style of the world, have not *properly resented injuries*, has arisen from their own weak and unequal conduct. Rash enough, perhaps, to give unnecessary offence, they are not believed when they plead principle, for refusing to make the customary satisfaction. A good man should be uniform throughout. He should be equally inoffensive in his conduct, as he is careful not to violate the law that forbids retaliation and violence.—There is a mild way of doing every thing—even of opposing the world. And

when steady virtue is supported by a calm and placid conduct;—when equal pains have been taken to avoid offering an offence, as there is reluctance shown to answer for it;—when readiness is shown to acknowledge and correct every inadvertent transport of the passions;—and when, on other occasions, permitted and approved by religion, a proper firmness of mind has been discovered, no degradation can result from refusing to comply with the common but false maxims of honour.—It was an excellent reply made by a brave and virtuous officer, to one who had challenged him to single combat.—“ You know I am not afraid to die; but I am afraid to commit a fault. If you wish to bring our personal courage to the proof, I challenge you to shew, in the next battle, which of us shall lead our troops with the greatest bravery to the charge.”—Many weak minds are capable of putting their lives to hazard in a sudden impulse of rage; but it requires much higher fortitude to encounter great and real dangers with coolness at the call of duty, and to display a shining virtue in the service of our country, or of mankind.

The maxims of revenge have been formed, if I may speak so, by the populace of the world. And whatever comes from that school, is always marked by its native characters of ignorance and weakness. Is not this remark verified by observation? Where are those doughty combats for honour found? Are they not usually among those who have little other claim to merit? who, having forfeited the real honour of wise and good men, are the more furious for the name? Are they not most frequently at the termination of those bacchanalian debauches, where men have given up not only the honour, but almost the character of human nature? Are they not, at
best,

best, in those moments of blind and intemperate passion, when man is no longer rational?

These are not merely professional declaimings, or the narrow reflections of a religious spirit unacquainted with the manners of the world. If the celestial purity of the Gospel—if the Divine Majesty of truth can receive support from earth, they will find it in the opinions of the wisest philosophers, and the bravest men of antiquity. The elder Cato had it for a maxim, “that we ought to pardon the faults of every other man, but never our own.” “Revenge,” says Plato, “although approved by the world, is never proper; nor can any injury justify retaliation.” Seneca declares, that “revenge is inhuman, however it be authorised by a pernicious custom.” On the other hand, says he, “How amiable is it when a man is incapable of being penetrated by any weapon, or of being hurt by injury or reproach!”—When Dion, that celebrated general and philosopher, had conquered Syracuse, two of his most inveterate enemies fell into his power. His friends persuaded him to take vengeance on them. But mark the wise and magnanimous reply of a great soldier—“Other generals delight in war and arms alone; but I, who have employed so much time in the pursuits of science, have studied, by its aids, to overcome anger, revenge, envy, obstinacy, and other pernicious passions of this kind. The surest proof of my success is, not only kindness to my friends, but lenity and forgiveness towards my unjust and inveterate enemies.” Cleomenes, king of Sparta, once said, “It is the office of a good prince to confer favours on his friends, and to inflict punishments on his enemies.” “How much better would it be,” replied Socrates, who heard him, “to do good to your friends, and to make friends of your enemies?” And no principle of conduct can be more wise and noble than

than that suggested by Diogenes, to a man who enquired how he might best be revenged on his enemy?—The philosopher answered, “By being better than he.”—I could fill the time of a long discourse with quotations to the same purpose. And it must afford a good man pleasure in reading the works of antiquity, to observe the conduct of the greatest men refuting the false maxims of modern honour, and to see the conclusions of reason, aided by philosophy alone, coinciding with the mild and beneficent precepts of the gospel. Although it may be beyond our sphere to emulate these illustrious men in the fame of their writings, or the glory of their achievements, is it not however the duty of every Christian to emulate them in the admirable spirit of their morals? If nature could guide them by her feeble lights to this high degree of excellence, to what perfection may we arrive, if we faithfully follow the clearer lights of the Sun of Righteousness.

4. In the last place, the reasonableness of this duty is illustrated from its resemblance to that beneficent attribute in God that is most interesting to man.

All our offences against heaven are freely forgiven us through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. When God assumed a visible form, it was to promulge the law of forgiveness and love—It was to give the most affecting example of it by offering his life to obtain the pardon of those who had offended him. My brethren! *if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.* Behold him dying for his enemies, and while they are perpetrating the most cruel of all injuries, hear him with infinite dignity and goodness, pronounce their forgiveness, and even make the apology of their crime—*Father forgive them, for they know not what they do!* Interesting example to us, whose sins were obliterated by that act!—who were rescued

rescued by it from the flames which our offences against him were, at that moment, kindling around us! With what force does it recommend to you from the cross, that divine precept, to *love your enemies, to bless those who curse you, to do good to those who hate you, and to pray for those who despitefully use you and persecute you, that ye may be the children of your heavenly Father, who maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and his rain to fall on the just and the unjust.* The apostle beautifully applies it to this use in his epistle to the Ephesians—*Be ye kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.* Can any character be more honourable to human nature than to resemble the perfection of God? Can any duty be more just than to forgive as we have been forgiven.

So many principles concur to recommend and urge this amiable exercise of Christian charity. The reasonableness of this duty appears, however, not only from the excellence, and amiableness of the dispositions from which it is derived;—but

II. From the insufficiency of the causes on which revenge is justified. These may be ranked under the following classes,—contradiction to our habits and opinions,—opposition to our pleasures or interests,—and injustice to our character and reputation.

1. Contradiction to our habits and opinions, in the first place, is apt to create an alienation of mind from those who oppose us, and to nourish the resentful passions.

What implacable oppositions have we seen grow up among men from diversity of sentiment in Religion, or in civil policy? Society, that was designed for the protection and peace of mankind, seems frequently to inflame the passions with greater ardour, by bringing them nearer

nearer together. And men, in the extravagance of misguided zeal in Religion, have thought to promote the cause of love and mercy, by the most frightful excesses of cruelty and rage.—Even on less important subjects, variety of opinion and diversity in the habits of taste and education, become sources of mutual alienation and contempt, that create many imaginary causes of dissention, and augment and imbitter those that are real. What ridicule, what sneer, what obloquy enter into different parties, and often form the spirit of the different circles into which society is divided? Do not these causes nourish the passions of hatred and pride? Do they not represent the actions and designs of men in a false and injurious light? Do they not contribute to render their dissentions unforgiving and eternal? Ah! my brethren, are not all these occasions of mutual alienation, when seriously and calmly estimated, unworthy and unreasonable? And yet, do we not see them every day violations, in the grossest manner, the spirit and the law of charity?

2. Another cause of revenge, as little justifiable, is opposition to our pleasures or our interests.

Interest and pleasure form those objects of pursuit that usually occupy the minds of men with the greatest ardour. If these are frequently and pointedly opposed, they are apt to create strong and lasting resentments. How can I love the man, you say, who on all occasions sets himself against me? How can I forgive the malice that is perpetually thwarting my purposes and defeating my views?—Let us examine the validity of these reasons.—Perhaps the malice you impute to him is only the colouring which your resentment gives to his successful rivalry. He is engaged in a pursuit of pleasures or interests similar to your own.—Your common views happen to terminate

terminate on the same objects, and your passions represent the interference that springs from the lawful exercise of his own rights, as flowing from malicious design. But admitting that he is an enemy as well as a rival,—do you not acquit him on your own principles by your hostility to him? And will you add to the injury he hath already done you a greater evil, by cherishing those unhallowed passions that offend God and disquiet your own peace? No, these enmities are at once ill founded and pernicious to your own souls. If opposition to our interests or our pleasures is not sufficient to justify the spirit of revenge—neither is,

3. Injustice to our character and reputation.

Character is the dearest possession to a good man. No wound afflicts him so deeply as an imputation on his honour or his virtue? But is it sufficient to authorise the purposes of revenge?—No, Religion prohibits all retaliation, except of good for evil.—Is it the proper way to vindicate our injured innocence? No, a gentle disposition and a virtuous conduct are the most effectual refutation of every slander. Is it even certain we have suffered the injury of which we complain?—In innumerable instances, if we carefully examine its grounds, we shall find it founded in misrepresentation. How many rash and imprudent persons take up a tale before they comprehend it, and propagate it with the colouring of their own imagination? How many malicious persons love in this way to augment the dissensions of society? How many vain and talkative persons permit themselves, without reflection, to disseminate the most pernicious and unfounded histories? What additions are made to the truth in passing only through a few mouths? How often have we known our own words to be distorted and invenomed
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by the malice or indiscretion of others?—And shall we, notwithstanding, take this uncertain ground to vindicate the most atrocious of all the passions? Possibly we do our brother a high injury by believing him capable of the injustice.

But admitting that he hath calumniated our character, —may it not have been the fruit of inconsideration merely? May it not have been occasioned by the officious zeal of false friends, who have poisoned his mind? May it not have sprung from dark and suspicious circumstances in our own conduct, which we have not condescended to explain?—It becomes a good man rather to find apologies for such actions than to prosecute them with rage. He ought to attribute them to the want of reflection, to the artifice of others, to the surprise of passion, to any cause rather than a malignant disposition. A great wit once said, “It is necessary only for mankind to converse together freely every day to make them all of one Religion.” We may say with at least equal truth, that it is necessary only for men to converse together freely, to remove a thousand prejudices, to extinguish a thousand animosities in their origin, and notwithstanding all the causes of division that exist in the world, to make them friends.—But if there are some who, through weakness of mind, or the violence of passion cannot be reclaimed, how ought a Christian to treat their obloquy? Not surely by imitating their crime. This is usually the proof of a vulnerable character in ourselves. The most clear and honourable vindication of ourselves is virtuous conduct. In the consciousness of innocence, virtue may be silent. There is, besides, a dignity in silence that makes a favourable impression on the world, and humbles an enemy much more than any retaliation of reproach or slander.—

slander.—But the most equivocal vindication of character, and even of that courage which modern ideas have made a substitute for character, is the single combat. No assault on our good name can justify this crime.—The spirit and the laws of the gospel condemn it.—A brave and virtuous man does not need it.—The most illustrious nations of antiquity, who civilized the earth, and who adorned human nature by their talents, knew no such methods to vindicate their injured honour, or to prop an infirm reputation. On this subject, however, I have already made the necessary reflections, and shall now dismiss the whole by remarking, that as they are our vanity and pride that are chiefly hurt by the tales of calumny, so they are these principles, so little becoming the imperfection of human nature, that give to the resentful passions their greatest force. Thus weak and insufficient are all those causes which are usually urged to justify the spirit of revenge.

And now, in the conclusion of this discourse, let me call your attention to the following reflections.

1. The first that I make is, that as it becomes a good man never to give just occasion of offence to others, it becomes him also, if he has been at any time surprised by his passions, to efface his fault by a speedy and candid acknowledgment. There is often more goodness and greatness of mind displayed in acknowledging than in not having committed an error. Caution in offending, and candour in confessing, are necessary perhaps to enable us with sincerity to forgive. Obedience to this law is less difficult when we are not conscious of a fault ourselves. There is a dignity in innocence that does not fear to be degraded by stooping to pardon. But if we have been betrayed to do wrong, and have not fortitude

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of mind enough to confess it, our own fault becomes the greatest obstacle to our duty, and an unforgiving spirit is cherished by a false sentiment of honour.

2. This duty I might recommend from the generosity and nobleness of its principle,—from the approbation of mankind,—and from the tranquillity and peace with which it will be accompanied in our own breasts.—But apart from all these considerations, which can touch only a great and worthy mind, it is a duty that addresses itself to our interest and our fears,—it is enjoined by all the authority, and enforced by all the terrors of Religion;—*for if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father, who is in heaven, forgive your trespasses.*—Haughty and revengeful spirits! look up to that tribunal where your own punishment awaits you, and let the awful majesty of Divine justice restrain your pride and rage! Remember that the measure which you mete to others shall be measured to you again. A resentful unforgiving temper can hope for no indulgence from the righteous Judge. On the other hand, meekness, gentleness, forgiveness, as they are abundant sources of inward consolation on earth, so they lead also to the regions of eternal peace in heaven.

3. This subject suggests the ardent charity with which we ought to embrace our brethren who have not injured us. If hostile intentions are to be forgiven,—if actual injuries are to be forgotten,—if enemies are to be beloved, with what warm affection ought we to regard those who are innocent?—Those who embrace us with kindness?—Those who are our sincere and active friends?—Those who are connected with us by the most tender relations?—And above all, those who add to these endearing ties their union with us in the household of faith?—The

united bands of humanity, friendship and religion, form the most powerful obligation to all the useful and amiable offices of fraternal love. And the power of forgiving an injury will be a certain pledge to ourselves and others of all that shall be attentive, tender and beneficent in the ordinary conduct of our life, and our commerce with society.

4. Finally, this subject is closely connected with piety as well as with morals. The tempers and habits of men give a tincture to the spirit of their Religion. The passions of revenge and hatred have contributed to clothe the Divine nature in those gloomy terrors, in which the superstitions of all ages have more or less invested it. The Deity has appeared in the most dismal forms, where his votaries have been the most unrelenting. Placid manners, on the other hand, and a benevolent disposition, naturally represent him in the charms of benignity and love. Our hearts then accord with the promise of our Saviour, and recommend it to our faith.—*If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.* Put on therefore, my brethren, the meekness of the blessed Jesus, who on the cross prayed for his murderers. Prove yourselves to be the children of your Father who is in heaven, by that spirit of love which is his image. You will hereby illustrate the beauty of Religion in the view of men,—you will augment and extend the happiness of society,—you will cultivate in your own bosoms the rich consolations of piety, and the hopes of eternal life,—and you will at once animate your devotions, and increase the happiness which a good man finds in them, by strengthening your faith in the Divine mercy.

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Do thou, O Most Holy and Gracious God ! create and cherish in our hearts, more and more, these heavenly dispositions, for the sake of Christ our Lord ! To whom with thee, and the eternal Spirit, be rendered glory everlasting. Amen.

S E R

S E R M O N XI.

THE SPIRITUAL DEATH AND LIFE OF
THE BELIEVER.

BY

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GAL. ii. 20.

*I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I,
but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live
in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who
loved me, and gave himself for me.*

TO understand these words it is necessary to attend
to their connection. The Apostle, in the former
part of the epistle, vindicates himself against the misre-
presentations of false teachers in the Galatian church,
who alleged that he was no apostle, and that he taught
doctrines contrary to Peter and the other apostles. In
the 16th verse of this chapter he begins to establish and
defend the doctrine of justification by faith, which these

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teachers

teachers attempted to subvert. They urged the strict observance of the ceremonial law, and particularly of circumcision, as necessary to salvation. The Apostle, on the other hand, excludes all works, whether of the ceremonial or moral law, from having any influence upon it, and directs to seek righteousness only through faith in Christ. He likewise answers that old and common objection made by adversaries, that if persons be not justified by their obedience to the law, then a door is opened to licentiousness, and Christ becomes the minister of sin. This he rejects by pressing holiness, or a strict conformity to the moral law; and lest they might say, that this was *building again* what he had *destroyed*, he shows, that faith and obedience are always united; that the same faith which looks to Christ for the pardon of sin, derives from him also strength to subdue it. *I through the law*, says he in the 19th verse, *am dead to the law, that I might live unto God*. By being dead to the law, we are not to understand the being freed from it as a rule of life; but the not putting confidence in obedience to it for justification. That obedience which the law demands has been fulfilled by Christ the Surety of the believer, and accepted in his behalf. He is also dead to the law, as being delivered from the curse of it. But though the law has neither power to save nor to condemn him, yet he is under obligation to live unto God. His being indebted to Christ is so far from excusing him, that it increases the obligation, and is the most powerful inducement to holiness of life. This the Apostle farther explains and enforces in the text.

I am crucified with Christ. "Through this crucified one, I die to the law, sin, and the world;—and my death resembles his. Nevertheless, as he rose and lives forever—
more,

more, so I live spiritually ; having grace here, the earnest of future glory.—Strictly speaking, however, it is not I that live. I am neither the cause nor the promoter of this life ; *but Christ liveth in me* ; by his Spirit directing the inclinations of my heart. *And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God.* The great instrument of my life is, a firm belief that Jesus, who was crucified, is the Son of God. Here I lay hold upon *the hope set before me* ; and this hope is *as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast.*” The Apostle speaks in the first person, *I*, and thus declares his own experience with respect to the doctrine he defends. This was his condition, and is truly the condition of all believers ; though they may not be able, so clearly, to adopt his language, or to use the appropriating words, *who loved me, and gave himself for me.*

In discoursing on this subject, I shall direct your attention to the leading thoughts ; and therefore, I shall endeavour to show, *First*, What is implied in being crucified with Christ.—*Secondly*, What we are to understand by Christ living in the believer ; and point out the great influence of faith in the divine life. Or, in fewer words, show—How the believer dies, and how he lives.

I. Expressions similar to this, of being *crucified with Christ*, are more than once used in the writings of the Apostle. No one will be so weak as to imagine that Paul was a sharer with Christ in the merit of his sufferings. Such a thought would be horrid and blasphemous. Thus, though he desires to *know the fellowship of his sufferings*, yet he means only to enjoy the benefit of them, and be conformed to them in his own. Seeing his Lord suffered, he did not repine, but rejoiced in suffering for his sake.

Accordingly he says, in another place, *if so be that we suffer with him*. How suffer with him? He means, in his cause, and by assistance derived from him. This is a part of conformity to Christ, as well as that he makes their sufferings his own, by tenderly sympathizing with them, strengthening and rewarding them.—There is implied in being crucified with Christ,

First, A refusing obedience to the ceremonial law, as being no longer necessary to salvation. It was only temporary. The design being fulfilled, it ceased to be of farther use. *The law*, says the Apostle, *was our schoolmaster, to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith*. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. Though certain erroneous teachers held that it was still obligatory, yet he declares, that he was crucified with Christ; that his death put an end to this legal service. When he said, *It is finished*, this law was abolished, and a new dispensation introduced.

Secondly, There is implied a cheerfulness in undergoing all that scorn and contempt with which a firm adherence to the doctrine of the cross was attended. *Christ crucified was unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness*. Notwithstanding the offence of the cross, the opposition to it, and the reproach to which the promoters of it were exposed, the Apostle was *not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ*. While his enemies in the church constrained their proselytes to be circumcised, and gloried in it, he rejected, with detestation, the thought of glorying, *save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*.

Suffice it just to mention these, as what may be implied when we consider the scope of the epistle, and the circumstances of Christians in the primitive state of the church.

Thirdly,

Thirdly, There is implied in this expression, a partaking of the merits of the death of Christ, and the being dead to the moral law, in the manner mentioned in the preceding verse. As in this and other places, the ceremonial law is to be understood, so the moral law is evidently to be included.

The believer is justified on account of the perfect obedience and meritorious death of Christ; the one answering to the precept of the law, and the other to the violation of it. Neither of these can be performed in his own person, the law admitting of no less than a perfect obedience, and the satisfaction it requires being infinite. This inability does not arise from any insufficiency in the law, but from that weakness in man which has taken place since the fall. *For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us.* Jesus Christ, being every way equal to the work of redemption, hath obeyed and suffered as the representative of all his spiritual seed. This righteousness is imputed to the believer. He is crucified with Christ. The demands of the law are answered for him by Christ, and accepted by God. In the plan of redemption, it is accounted the same as if the believer had done it personally.

In the first covenant, Adam, representing his posterity, by his failure, involved them in sin and misery: In the second covenant, Christ, representing his chosen, restores them to the favour of God. *For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners; so by the obedience of one, shall many be made righteous. There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.* The believer renounces his own righteousness as the ground of

confidence before God. Any thing he does or suffers is neither whole nor part of the righteousness which saves him. The Apostle, in the third chapter of his epistle to the Philippians, sets this matter in a clear point of light. *If any other man, says he, thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more.* Then having summed up his privileges, and told us, that *touching the righteousness which is in the law, he was blameless,* he adds, *But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.*—This righteousness, which is imputed to the believer, as the only foundation of his acceptance with God, and title to eternal life, does not supersede the necessity of an inherent righteousness. The pardon of sin and the destruction of it in the soul, are inseparable; and therefore,

In the *fourth* place, There is implied, in being crucified with Christ, an experience of the efficacy of his death. This is no doubt an important, if not the principal idea in the words, and which we find plainly expressed in the following passages: *Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts.* By the body of sin in the one place, and the flesh in the other, is meant that corrupt nature which mankind inherit since their apostacy; that evil propensity and opposition to holiness which is in us. It has been called the

power

power or dominion of sin, and consists in want of conformity to God, and a disposition to offend.

The person who is crucified with Christ is, in some measure, brought to this conformity, the power of sin being subdued. The obedience and death of Christ produce this, as in consequence of these, the Holy Spirit creates anew the heart, and cherishes holy desires and resolutions. Under the influence of this blessed agent, the believer is sanctified and prepared for the enjoyment of God. The great means of carrying on this work, are the truths of the everlasting Gospel, especially those which respect the sufferings and death of the Saviour.

The contemplation of this amazing object crucifies sin in the soul. Here is a display of the holiness and justice of God. He is so holy, that he will manifest his abhorrence of sin; and so just, that he will by no means clear the guilty. These perfections of Deity, shining in the sufferings of Christ, burn up the dross of sin, and inspire with the strongest detestation against it. Here is a display of love and mercy sufficient to melt the soul, and stir up every grateful feeling. Holiness, justice and mercy are sweetly blended. Sin is punished, and the sinner saved. Pardon is free and unbounded, and yet sin discountenanced, nay effectually destroyed, expires on the cross. Every view the believer takes of his bleeding Saviour, sin receives a wound. He looks upon Him whom he has pierced, and mourns. He suffers real agony, in that his sins were the occasion of his bitter death; his sins, the nails and spear that pierced his sacred body, and opened those wounds which streamed salvation to the children of men. Thus is the believer crucified with Christ; and the death of sin in him resembles a crucifixion. It was a painful, shameful, lingering and accursed death; and so is the death of sin.

It is painful. The first entrance upon a religious course is difficult; and the more so, where sin has long had the dominion. Conversion is a strait gate through which we must pass, and holiness a narrow way, in which we must walk to eternal life. The sinner's return to God is likened by our Saviour to a second birth, and, among other reasons, because it is painful. The Christian life is compared to a race, to a fight, and such things in which vigorous exertions are required. There are many lusts, dear as a right eye and a right hand, which must be plucked out and cut off. *If any man will come after me, says Christ, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.* We must be denied to ourselves and to the world; difficulties are to be surmounted, temptations resisted, injuries forgiven, and reproaches endured. This is a painful work; often like to be overcome, and still renewing the combat. The Apostle, groaning under the weight of corruption, cried, *O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*

Again, It is shameful. When iniquities prevail, the believer is covered with shame and confusion of face. This may rise to such a degree, that he will be tempted to cease from seeking God. After a base and ungrateful conduct, he is afraid to appear in the Divine presence; when he does, he *abhors himself and repents in dust and ashes.* The Psalmist, convinced of his error, made this acknowledgment,—*So foolish was I and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee.* When the Saviour, after an unkind and untender walk, condescends to give us tokens of his love, and shew us, as he did unbelieving Thomas, his hands and his side, how is sin crucified with shame!

Again, The death of sin is very lingering. It is dying from the moment Christ is formed in the soul, till glory commences. To what end are the means of grace? To

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what end the numerous afflictions and temptations which befall the Christian, as he passes through life, but to destroy sin? And yet it still lives. It withdraws but to return; it sleeps but to awake again. Like a monster of many heads, though deprived of one, it has another; nay, one shoots out from the place another was lopped off.

Moreover, the death of the cross was an accursed death; inflicted on none but those guilty of the blackest crimes; such as were accursed of men, and held to be accursed of God too. Sin is that which has introduced death into the world, and all our woe; is that abominable thing which the Lord hates; and, therefore, is the object of the greatest hatred with the believer. He seeks the destruction of it without mercy.

From these considerations we may see the propriety and force of this expression, *crucified with Christ*, and all of the like kind in scripture.

In the *last* place, There is implied a self-denied temper towards this present world. Though this may be included in the former particulars, yet it may be considered as something distinct, and is of importance in the present subject. *God forbid*, says the Apostle, *that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world*. We cannot argue from hence, that we should cast off all care and concern about the world; nor that every degree of desire after, and delight in the things of the world is sinful; nor yet that we are to withdraw ourselves from the company and conversation of the men of the world: but that from a sense of the vanity and emptiness of the world, our hopes and expectations of happiness ought not to be placed upon it, and that we ought to cheerfully part with every earthly thing, and go to death for Christ, if he calls

us to it. Hear his own words: *He, that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me. And he, that taketh not his cross and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.* He hath likewise, in this respect, left us an example that we should follow his steps. He was denied to the riches and honours of this world; and *for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame.*

In the early days of the church, the profession of the religion of Jesus exposed persons to the hazard of their lives and estates, and particularly the publishers of the Gospel could expect nothing else but a constant scene of difficulties and persecution. The Apostle has recorded many trials and distresses which he encountered; and it is said that he suffered a violent death at last; so that there is a peculiar emphasis in his saying that he was crucified with Christ. Every believer indeed, ought to be a martyr in his temper, and hang so loose to this world and its enjoyments, nay, to life itself, that he may readily part with all to win Christ.

These things are implied in the crucifixion of the believer. I proceed now,

II. To consider his life. *Christ liveth in him; and the life which he now lives in the flesh, is by the faith of the Son of God.*

This is the divine or spiritual life which he lives in consequence of sin being mortified, and the heart renewed. As he dies to sin, so he rises to holiness. So we are taught in these words—*That ye put off, concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt, according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit*
of

of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness.

Here is the corrupt nature called the old man, which is put off, or crucified with Christ; and the spiritual life called the new man, because a new principle is infused; and this new man is the image of God, consisting in righteousness and true holiness. It is the conformity of our natures to the holy nature of God, and the conformity of our lives to the will of God.

The manner in which Christ lives in the believer, is by his holy Spirit, who begins and carries on the divine life. We cannot make ourselves alive to God. That Almighty power which called, *Lazarus come forth*, must call us from the death of sin. That Divine Spirit who quickened the dead body of the Saviour when it lay in the tomb, must quicken our souls to a life of grace.—Having begun the work, he carries it on to perfection; and for this purpose, he dwells and lives in believers; incites holy desires; directs the meditations of the heart; enables them to overcome and subdue their lusts; strengthens them under afflictions; and quickens them in the way of duty. Christ thus living in them, they are actuated by the same temper, and seek the same things. They imitate his example; and endeavour to resemble him as far as their nature and circumstances will admit.

The great instrument of this spiritual life is faith. By this they are united to the Son of God; depend upon his merits for pardon, and derive influences for sanctification. It is called *the faith of the Son of God*, because he is the great object of it, and because it is of his bestowing. Perhaps there is something in this phrase more peculiar to the time in which the Apostle lived. The faith of the Son of God; that is, a firm belief that Jesus of Nazareth

Nazareth who was crucified on Calvary, was the true and expected Messiah; that he was no impostor, but really the Son of God; that he rose again and ascended up into heaven; and that there is forgiveness of sins through his blood. These were the great truths upon which the Apostle insisted in his discourses, and proposed for the belief of his hearers. When he preached at Athens, we find that some said, *He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods; because he preacheth unto them, Jesus and the resurrection.* To have a proper notion how the doctrine of a crucified Saviour appeared at its first publication, we must imagine ourselves in their place, with all their prejudices in favour of a false religion. Among us we are early initiated in the Christian system, and taught from childhood that Jesus is the Son of God, the true and only Saviour; and therefore, we are in danger of contenting ourselves with a belief *merely speculative.* There was not so much danger at the first publication of the Gospel; because it can hardly be admitted that any would embrace a religion so contrary to human wisdom—attended with such ignominy and reproach—and, withal, exposing its friends to so much hazard and difficulty, unless they felt the power of it, and were sincere in their profession. What multitudes profess it now, whose lives loudly testify against them! If they believe him to be the Son of God, where is the efficacy of his death upon them? where that transformation into the Divine image, which always accompanies a view of Divine glory, shining in the sufferings of this wonderful Person?

Faith in Christ, as being the Son of God, is that by which every believer lives. Allow me, in a few particulars, to point out its influence.

First,

First, Faith is that act of the soul which receives and rests upon the righteousness of Christ for pardon and acceptance with God. The believer, convinced of his guilt, unworthiness, and utter inability, accepts the free offer of salvation made in the Gospel, as his only ground of hope. This exercise he has occasion often to repeat; not that his justification before God is incomplete, or that he needs to be often justified; but that a manifestation of his interest in the fulness of Christ, is necessary to his encouragement and comfort.

Secondly, By faith, influences are derived for the mortification of sin and the promotion of holiness. *He that abideth in me, saith Christ, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing.* The substance of these things having been already said, all that may be necessary to add is, that although the righteousness of Christ be the meritorious cause of justification, and the Spirit of Christ the efficacious cause of sanctification, yet faith is that which interests us in these blessings, and is the mean of their conveyance.

Once more: Faith influences the believer to live with regard to another world. It is described in the epistle to the Hebrews, to be *the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.* It is a confident expectation of the things which God hath promised. It realizes the invisible glories of a future state, and causes us to believe them as strongly as what we see with the bodily eyes. The men of the world live by sense. External objects engage the whole of their attention and affections. The things of another world are future and invisible; and therefore they do not strike and affect them. It is faith which makes them present and visible.

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The believer seeks a better country, that is an heavenly. He knows that if the earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, he has a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.—What though difficulties beset him on every side? It is the promise of a gracious God, that *all things shall work together for his good*. The present afflictions are light and momentary, compared to an exceeding and eternal weight of glory. What though he is now immured in frail flesh and blood? Before long this mortal shall put on immortality, and he shall be made inconceivably happy in the pure mansions of heavenly glory. He may be stripped of every earthly comfort, but there is a joy which no man can take from him. Amidst the vain and shifting scenes of life, he has an immoveable rock to lean upon, *Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever*. Persecutors may kill the body, but the soul is incapable of injury. This heavenly spark shall survive the rage of men and the malice of devils; ascend to the God of all consolation; be re-united to the body; fashioned like unto the glorious body of Christ, and be ever with him.

Faith presenting these things, and affording a sure expectation of them, influences the Christian to live above this world, and to raise his views to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for him.

Let us now turn our attention to some improvement of this subject.

First, Learn, my brethren, that the religion of Jesus leads to strict holiness of heart and life. If any tell you, that the doctrine of salvation, through the imputed righteousness

ousness of Christ, encourages sin, believe them not; for scripture and experience contradict it. Who live the best?—Those who contend for free grace, or those who rest upon their works? It too often happens, that those who boast of their works, have the least to show; and there is reason to believe, that they have never sufficiently seen the depravity of their own hearts, and the spirituality and extent of the Divine law.

While we are justified freely through the redemption that is in Christ, including both his active and passive obedience, there is the powerful operation of grace to form the heart. Shall it be said, if Christ obeyed the preceptive part of the law in our room, what obedience is left for us? This very objection, in substance, has been answered long ago by an inspired pen. *Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid: how shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?* A dependence upon the active obedience of Christ for a title to eternal life, and obedience in our own persons, are not inconsistent either in sentiment or practice. *For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him.* It is impossible that believers should live in sin; because it is weakened on their first union with Christ, and afterwards gradually destroyed. Grace is communicated for this purpose, and their obligations to obedience are infinite. The love of Christ constrains them. It certainly affords a most encouraging reflection, that in the Lord is not only righteousness but strength. This is a source of joy and comfort. This quickens and animates in the ways of holiness.

Secondly, This subject ought to be faithfully improved for the trial of ourselves. As far as we hear with application,

cation, so far we hear properly. . . When we hear the state of a believer described, ought we not to ask ourselves, Have we experienced any thing like it? or, is it new, strange and unintelligible to us?—These things concern us all, and require our attention now as much as when they were first written; for it ever will remain true, that the believer is crucified with Christ; that Christ lives in him; and that he lives by faith in the manner which has been explained. Know ye then what these mean? Have you reason to believe that you are interested in the merits of Christ? Is the power of sin broken in your souls? Do you desire the death of it, root and branch? Do you know what it is to live by faith? Have you ever had such an affecting view of the Son of God suffering in the room of sinners, that your hearts were melted to genuine sorrow for sin, and you made willing to surrender yourselves without reserve to him? And have you been frequently used to such exercises?

Perhaps some are saying, " We have never been able to answer these questions satisfactorily to ourselves. At times, we have had ground of hope, but presently we are in darkness again. We find the principle of sin so strong within us, that we fear it has never been crucified. Evil thoughts in multitudes break in upon us: our affections are so earthly; we feel such coldness and wandering in duty; nay, sometimes sin appears to have the entire sway; and therefore, we are ready to conclude, that we are not the children of God." If you are sensible of these things; if you strive against them; and if you spread them as matter of complaint before God, they do not make against you. It is not expected that sin should be fully dead. Live and stir it will, else there would be no occasion of a warfare. If there were no pain and struggle,

struggle, and groaning, where would be the propriety of calling it a crucifixion? The question is, Do you truly hate all sin, and desire deliverance from it more than from any thing besides? Is the way of salvation precious to you on this very account, because it has provided for the death of sin? Have you often an affecting sense of the holy nature of God, and your great disconformity to him? Can you adopt the language of the Psalmist, *I have seen an end of all perfection; but thy commandment is exceeding broad?* The more you have of this exercise, the more it evinces the truth of your religion. It is a bad sign, when we find in ourselves no cause of complaint.

Some, it may be, have blasphemous thoughts suggested to their minds; are tempted to doubt the very existence of a God, and the reality of all religion. Neither is this an evidence of the want of grace; but that Satan desires to *sift them as wheat*. A person is not accountable for these thoughts, unless they are harboured and encouraged in his breast.

Examine, then, and try yourselves.—Beware of presumption on the one hand, and of tempting God on the other, by despising the day of small things. If you desire above all the favour of God; if you would not willingly indulge yourselves in any known sin; if you are endeavouring to have your hearts right with God, and are sincerely engaged in the way of duty: though iniquities prevail against you, and though you walk in darkness and have no light, yet there is reason to expect that God will, in due time, lift up the light of his countenance upon you, and put gladness in your hearts. *Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait I say on the Lord.*

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But do not some of you, my hearers, know upon reflection, that you are strangers to the exercises which have been described? *The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.* Crucified and yet live! Not live, but Christ lives in them! Live a natural life, and yet by faith a spiritual one! On earth, and yet the affections and conversation in heaven! What paradoxes are these! How mysterious and difficult a thing to be a Christian!—O bestir yourselves and set about the great work. Dream not of happiness while you are secure and unconcerned. While sin reigns in you, and while you neglect the means of grace, on what foundation can you hope for eternal life? By nature you are opposed to good, and wholly inclined to evil; and unless changed by grace, you can never inherit the kingdom of God. You must be crucified to your own righteousness, to your lusts, and to the world, if ever you arrive there. It is no matter what any man professes, that is, it will not avail for his salvation, unless it influence the practice; unless the Son of God cover the soul with his perfect righteousness, and impress on it the Divine image. To this I would bring you my hearers, and unless you are brought to this, though your souls were worth ten thousand worlds, they must fall under the justice of the great and terrible God.

Suffer the word of exhortation, to turn and live. Those sins you so dearly love will be your ruin. Be persuaded to part with them. Your carnal joys and pleasures will lead you down to the region of sorrow. Be entreated to dismiss them. You walk on a dreadful slippery precipice, and beneath you are everlasting burnings. Proceed not a step further. While there is hope, turn. Be-

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take you to the duties of religion. Call upon the Lord, that you perish not. Lay hold on the righteousness of Christ. He is able and willing to save you. You ought not to hesitate a moment, when your all is at stake. Receive an offered Saviour, and you shall be happy in soul and body for ever. Neglect him, and you must be eternally wretched. There is salvation in no other; and there is a complete one in him. There is the pardon of sin by his blood, and the death of sin by his Spirit. There is peace of conscience, guidance through life, comfort in trouble, joy more than can be expressed, with every necessary grace; and a happiness after death, rising to the very height of your wishes, and lasting as God himself. Why then should you continue in the love and practice of sin? Why in the neglect of known duty? Why should religion be deferred for a single day or hour? Have not some of you deferred it so often already, as to convince you that this is the most gross delusion? Think not of a time to come. We trust in vain to futurity. Before the setting sun, your eyes and mine may be closed in the sleep of death. *Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.* This day and not the next, this hour and not the next, this moment and not the next. *Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.*

To conclude, those of you, my brethren, whose consciences testify that you are not strangers to these spiritual exercises, strive to grow more and more in conformity to God. This is the best evidence of your sincerity. You have not *already attained, neither are already perfect.*—Learn that your only help is laid on the righteousness

and strength of your exalted Redeemer. Live by faith in him. *Of his fulness receive, and grace for grace.* Be not discouraged under any difficulties; *being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ: Unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time, without sin unto salvation.*

S E R.

SERMON XII.*

THE CHARACTER AND MISERY OF
THE WICKED.

BY

WILLIAM LINN, D. D.

One of the Ministers of the Reformed Dutch Church,
New-York.

ISA. lvii. 21.

There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.

YOU will easily remember, my brethren, that some time ago, I had the happiness of addressing you on the prospect of a safe and honourable peace being restored to our distressed land.—You were then pleased to hear me with attention; and your patriotism kindly approved what was sincerely aimed to express our joy, and excite

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* The two following sermons were written and preached in Pennsylvania, soon after the establishment of peace, in the year 1783. Several reasons have induced the author to retain nearly the original form.

our gratitude to the munificent Donor of all things. It is hoped that we and succeeding generations, will continue to enjoy temporal peace and prosperity.

But while we rejoice in the goodness of the Lord, we ought to remember, that our duration in this world is short—that only they can be happy who enjoy the Divine favour—nay, that without this, present advantages will make our condemnation at last the more terrible. Let none, therefore, say to their souls, “Take your ease—the desolation of war is now over—our difficulties are removed—and peace and plenty have once more taken up their habitation with us;”—for the Lord declares, in the words of the text, *There is no peace to the wicked*. Though the long and bloody conflict is at an end, yet if we have not a proper temper towards God, we are still in the utmost danger; if not in this world, yet in that which is to come; when he will render to every one according to his works, and pour out his wrath on the wicked without any mixture of mercy.

To alarm our fears, and excite us to seek the Lord while he may be found, I shall, with plainness and freedom, shew, *first*, Who come under the description of the wicked; and, *secondly*, In what respects there is no peace to such.

I. In general, all they are properly denominated wicked who have never undergone a change of heart. Mankind by nature have no inclination to the service of God. They are represented in scripture, as *without strength and ungodly—as dead in trespasses and sins—as enemies in their minds by wicked works*, and even as *enmity* itself against God. Hence arises the necessity of a great and supernatural change; which our Saviour compares to a *second birth*; and it is set forth by other similitudes in the

the writings of the Apostles. It is likened to a *resurrection*—to a *new creation*—to a *translation from darkness to light*; all which teach us, that before we can be accepted of God, and entitled to his favour, some extraordinary work must take place upon us. To deny this, we must reject both reason and revelation; for both conspire in declaring that man is degenerate, and that while he continues in this state, he cannot have communion with a Holy God. As soon might we reconcile light and darkness, or bring the most opposite extremes together.

Whatever kinds, and whatever degrees of wickedness there are, they all proceed from an innate depravity of mind. Hear the words of Christ: *For from within, out of the heart of man, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness; all these evil things come from within.* Every unrenewed person has in his nature the seeds of all evil; and which appear more or less in his life, according as opportunities are afforded to nourish and strengthen them. To assist us in judging the better of our own characters, let us attend to the different ways in which this root of bitterness discovers itself.

First, Some are grossly ignorant of the plain and essential doctrines of the Christian religion, amidst the best means to gain an acquaintance with them. Though the scriptures are in their possession, together with excellent helps by the writings of pious men, and instructions from the pulpit, yet they are unable to give any satisfactory account of those truths, on which their eternal salvation depends. This is not occasioned by want of capacity, but by utter neglect of divine things, and argues their spiritual death. The holy oracles, which contain the words of eternal life, neglected, gather dust; while books

of amusement and earthly pursuits employ the whole of their time. These swallow up their thoughts through the day, and recline with them on their pillow at night. These will not allow them to remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

We find many of this character who are wise in their own conceit, for pride and ignorance mostly dwell together. "We have, say they, a sufficient knowledge of our duty, and we need not be informed of it. If we act wrong, the blame is our own, and we know not why any one should intermeddle with our business." Well might Solomon say, *There is more hope of a fool than of such persons.* Their minds are dark, and they have closed every avenue by which light might enter. *Every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.* Be assured there can be no true religion without a good measure of knowledge, and a desire of growing in it. We cannot love and worship an unknown God. Whoever among you are ignorant of the great truths of revelation, are in darkness even until now.

Secondly, Some break out into open acts of wickedness. Such are drunkards, swearers, unclean persons, extortioners, Sabbath-breakers, and mockers at religion. These are they whose *sins are open beforeband, going before to judgment.* Were we to rank no others, under the gospel, in the class of the wicked, but of these, how great a number would be found! Reckon even common swearers, those audacious men, who call for the vengeance of a God upon themselves and others, as well as use the names of Lord and Christ, and sacred things with irreverent lips: and we must reckon,—how dreadful to tell it! multitudes, who have been baptized and educated among professing Christians. When to these we add lascivious talkers

talkers and actors, insatiable lovers of strong drink, those who spend the the Sabbath in sleep, in visiting, in worldly thoughts and conversation, or in worse; those who suppose that *gain is godliness*; who cheat and over-reach their neighbour; and those whose wit never shines but in making a jest of the Bible, and serious persons, how does the dismal catalogue swell! surely it will be agreed, that all such characters are wicked; and that none of these *shall inherit the kingdom of God*.

Thirdly, Others, though free from gross immoralities, are yet wicked, because they neglect the duties of religion. There are sins of commission, and there are sins of omission. We are guilty before God, when we do not perform what he hath enjoined, as well as when we commit what he hath forbidden. All, therefore, who live in the habitual omission of what is required, come short of, and will be condemned by that law, which is holy, just, and good. Not only is the unjust man a sinner, but the uncharitable also; not only he that curseth his father and mother, but he that honoureth them not; not only the profane, but the prayerless. We must not divide the law in our practice. One part must be done, and the other not left undone. *Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.* "Some sins in themselves, and by reason of several aggravations, are more heinous in the sight of God than others, but every sin deserveth God's wrath and curse both in this life, and that which is to come." The impious wretch, whose mouth is full of blasphemy and deceit, may deserve a more dreadful punishment; and yet the prayerless person will go down to misery as surely as he.

Having mentioned the important duty of prayer, allow me to say, that it is with an ill face that any, who profess

feels themselves to be Christians, neglect it in their families. Social, as well as secret worship, is indispensably necessary. Those who omit it, do not distinguish themselves from the ungodly world, and are unworthy of the privileges of the church. Such ought to think seriously of these words of Christ: *Whoever, therefore, shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in Heaven. But whoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in Heaven.* What shall be said of some, so destitute of any form of religion, that they omit what is called saying grace before meat, or asking the blessing of God on their food? It is not the sneer of fools, nor the raillery of the profane, should put us out of the practice of what is warranted in scripture, consonant to reason, and customary among all denominations of Christians whatsoever. The person who does not often realize his dependence upon God; who does not in every thing give thanks; and who does not, on proper occasions, openly acknowledge God, by calling on his name, has no title to be thought religious; else there is no criterion by which to judge at all.

In former days, many confessed Christ at the hazard; and even the loss of their lives. Have we found an easier way to heaven? Can we go there, without any confession? Is religion of such a nature that we may mould it as we please? The fashion of this world passeth away; but be assured, God and religion are *ever the same*. The Divine precepts will not bend to you. They are fixed and immutable. On no other terms can you be a disciple of Christ, than by *taking up your cross and following after him*. If the world deride you as stiff and unfashionable, it is a persecution you must suffer for his name's sake.

sake. He hath said, *He that findeth his life shall lose it : and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.*

Fourthly, There are some who adopt loose and dangerous principles, who allege, either that the scripture is not true, or that the great doctrines, as generally taught, are not contained in it. These are wicked, and they are corrupters of others. Too commonly they are licentious in their practice, and swelled with a conceit of their own abilities.

It is not easy to persist in a course of iniquity, without something to quiet the conscience ; and, therefore, have some endeavoured to overturn revelation, or at least to adapt it to their own depraved inclination. The infidel or Deist is a person of such great strength of reason, that he sees no need of the scripture, his own reason teaching him all that is necessary ; he is of such prodigious modesty, that he views all the world around him, even those of superior talents, as a number of superstitious fools ; his genius is so piercing as to discover that the Christian religion is the device of rulers and cunning priests to keep the world in awe ; and he wishes to perform the mighty service of setting mankind free from the shackles wherewith they have been bound for so many ages. To treat him with ridicule is no more than just retaliation. It is the best weapon the Deist has, and of which he is extremely fond ; so much so, that one writer has made it the only proper test of truth *. The secret motive, however, which leads many of this character to a rejection of scripture, is the desire of being free from its restraints. They are wedded to their lusts, and these and the scripture are irreconcilable. Unhappy men ! engaged in an undertaking desperate and impossible ; like one who attempts to stop the sun, or remove a mountain. The words which are storied of the apostate Julian, when mortally

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tally wounded in fighting against Christians, will be the doleful dying song of every determined infidel: "Thou hast conquered me, O Galilean." *Whofoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.*

Though revelation be not altogether denied by others, yet it is wrested to suit the depraved taste of mankind. They set up corrupt reason in opposition to faith, and adopt principles which lead to licentiousness. Not to be particular here, suffice it to say, that the doctrines of man's depravity, inability, and salvation by grace, through faith in the imputed righteousness of Christ, as they are taught in the Divine word, so they have been always successful for the conversion of sinners, and the edification of saints. They who oppose these set themselves in opposition to God, and seek to lay another foundation than what he hath laid. Indeed, it is to be expected, that infidelity and dangerous opinions will have a more rapid growth in this country than heretofore. In every age have they sprung up to trouble the church. They will be imported from abroad, with other things injurious to our interest and happiness, as well as that they naturally increase with population and luxury.

Fifthly, Among the wicked we must also rank the formalist and the hypocrite. Though these are mentioned together, yet they are of very different description. The formalist is one who has the form of Religion, submits to the drudgery of performing duty, for which he has no spiritual life or strength: he deceives himself; whereas the express design of the hypocrite is to deceive others. Of the first the Apostle speaks, when he says, *Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof*. However exact he may be in his cold and even round of duties, yet his heart is not right with God; and perhaps he indulges

indulges himself in sin, trusting to his form to save him. Of hypocrisy our Saviour gives a description, when he says, *When thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do, in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men.* We have a remarkable instance of it in the Pharisees of old. They devoured widows houses, and for a pretence made long prayers. Who would have thought that so excellent a thing as Religion would be so basely abused? That men with this cloak would cover their villanies? Their conduct is extremely foolish and desperately wicked.

Once more: I may mention, as descriptive of the wicked, that they are impatient of restraint and reproof. They cannot bear to be checked in their mad career of sin and folly; and the faithful reprover, if such be found, is hated and avoided. The very sight and example of the godly is a secret reproof to the wicked; it is a contrast to their own conduct; gives them disagreeable feelings, and therefore they strive to be out of the way. Sometimes they are so bold as to expose, in a ludicrous manner, every appearance of sincerity, and laugh and jest merely to keep themselves in countenance.

The preacher who seeks to save himself and them that hear him, by telling them plainly of their sins, and denouncing the judgments of God, is thought rigid and severe. Ahab, the king of Israel, said of Micaiah, the son of Imla, *I hate him, for he never prophesieth good unto me, but always evil.* The discourse which flows smooth and even, dwelling on generals, not directed to the conscience, nor sinners pursued in it by the terrors of the Lord, is most applauded. It is related as fact of a preacher,

er, who had arrived at so great perfection in adapting himself to delicate ears, that he once told his hearers, "If they did not vouchsafe to give a new turn to their lives, they would go to a place he did not choose to name in so courtly an audience." It is no breach of charity to say, that such preachers and their hearers are in danger of going down to hell, and enduring never-ceasing torments, of which we should now often hear and think, that so we may be excited to lay hold upon the hope set before us. If danger is not known, how shall it be shunned? We do not preach you *to*, but *from* these everlasting burnings. If our own hearts do not condemn us, why should we fear? If they do, O! what madness to shut our eyes, and wander heedlessly on! Will this make the danger less? What fearfulness must seize such, when they come to stand on the brink of the awful pit!

That there is an improper method of reproving sinners is certain; a method tending more to disgust than edify even pious ears. *The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.* There are many descriptions of heaven and hell to no purpose, or worse: *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man*, the one or the other. The joys of the one, and the terrors of the other, are best represented in the language of sacred writ. Besides, *the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword*; and is that instrument by which, in his dispensation of grace, he *wounds* and he *heals*.

SERMON XIII.

THE CHARACTER AND MISERY OF
THE WICKED.

BY

WILLIAM LINN, D.D.

One of the Ministers of the Reformed Dutch Church,
New-York.

ISA. lvii. 21.

There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.

HAVING endeavoured, in a former discourse, so to describe the wicked, as that we might be assisted in forming a judgment of ourselves, I proceed now to show,

II. In what respects there is no peace to such.

First, There is no peace to them with God. By their wickedness they wage war with heaven, and the Almighty King is angry with them every day. Man, hearkening to the suggestions of Satan, has thrown off allegiance to his rightful owner, transgressed his holy law, refused

refused that tribute of praise which is due, and engaged in open rebellion. Whatever we may think of the claims of fellow-mortals, surely the great God hath an unquestionable right to us and all our service. He hath made, and continually upholds us. Of him we cannot be independent, and our happiness lies in his favour. Having ruined ourselves, he found out a help. He sent his Son to fulfil the demands of the law in our room, and in his Gospel he proclaims pardon and peace to all who will return. Only they have reconciliation with him, who have submitted to his terms; who, forsaking their sins, have believed in the name of his Son. The impenitent and unbelieving must fall under the stroke of his justice. To their rebellion they add ingratitude, by making light of the offers of grace.

Having no peace with God, of what advantage are the most flattering circumstances in this world? Of what advantage that we are the citizens of a free state, and the nations around in league with us? These indeed are inestimable blessings, and which we must not tamely surrender to every proud and ambitious spirit; but can they make us happy hereafter? We may not enjoy them a day, or an hour. While we continue under the power of sin, we are the most abject slaves. We do the works of the devil, who delights in the ruin and misery of our race.—Is not the displeasure of our Maker enough to embitter every comfort, or render us joyless in the midst of every earthly good thing? How dreadful to think that his curse is upon us when we lie down and rise up, and in all our ways! How fearful to know that we must fall at last into the hands of the living God! This is the pitiable condition of the wicked, to whom,

In the second place, There is no peace in their own consciences. The thoughts of what their crimes have exposed

posed them to, often tear them with the most bitter reflections. Some of them have been afraid to be left alone; and dismal spectres, which guilt formed, have haunted them in the midnight hours. It is said of the infidel Hobbes, "that though he would speak very strange and unbecoming things of God, yet in his study in the dark, and in his retired thoughts, he trembled before him. If his candle happened to go out in the night, he awoke in terror and amazement. He was unable to bear the dismal reflections of his dark and desolate mind; and knew not how to extinguish, nor how to bear the light of *the candle of the Lord* within him."

See the man of pleasure, how gaily he walks abroad! What cheerfulness in his looks! He affects to esteem the more sober part of mankind as precise and supercilious! Talk to him of conscience, and he hardly restrains a burst of laughter! Did you see him in some hour of sickness, gloom and solitude, you might find distress pictured in his face, arising from remorse within. Though repeated acts of sin sear the conscience, and render it less sensible, yet there are few but have their severe twinges and repenting seasons. It is easier to prostitute conscience than to silence it.—"Whatever there be in the air, there is certainly an elastic power in conscience that will bear itself up, notwithstanding the weight that is laid upon it to stifle and kill its clamours." Dr Doddridge, in his life of that memorable convert, Col. Gardiner, informs us, "That still the checks of conscience, and some remaining principles of so good an education as he had received, would break in upon his most licentious hours; and that he told him, when some of his dissolute companions were once congratulating him on his distinguished felicity, a dog happening at that time to come into the room, he could not forbear groaning inwardly, and saying to himself, "Oh, that I

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were that dog!" Such was then his happiness; and such perhaps is that of hundreds more, who bear themselves highest in the contempt of religion, and glory in that infamous servitude which they call liberty.

If the conscience of the wicked be easy, it must be in one or more of these ways, either by a long course of iniquity, or by adopting false principles, or by a comparison with others who are thought worse; or by resolving to amend in future; or by performing part of the duties of Religion. Wo to those who are able to quiet it by any of them. It will some time or other awake to their sorrow. Like a frozen viper laid to the fire, it will recover strength, and sting them to the heart. Take them in their most composed frame, how far are they from that serenity of soul which Religion gives. This is a *peace which passeth all understanding*. The minds of the wicked are restless, and hurried by their lusts and passions. In the verse preceding the text, it is said, *The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt*: But in the godly soul there is a calm. The contemplation of heavenly things affords complacency; and in God the soul can hope and rest for time and eternity. *Peace*, said Christ to his disciples, *I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you*. With this peace, what earthly blessing can be compared? Could we command every thing our hearts would wish, where is the enjoyment, if the mind be disquieted? This, like an aching tooth, or a bone out of joint, will disturb us, will break our sleep, and render us unhappy.

Perhaps some may think, that only atrocious sinners are subject to such severe lashes. Generally it is so; but every person estranged from God is destitute of solid and lasting peace. It is owing to ignorance and mistake that
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He has any at all. There are no sins small, considered with respect to God. It is found so in a thorough conviction; and their being committed against the light and grace of the Gospel, highly aggravates them, and is a bitter ingredient to all true penitents. Our hearts condemn us for secret as well as for open sins; for omissions as well as transgressions. Unless then conscience is unduly hushed, it cannot otherwise than molest all who are not reconciled to God.

Again: There is no peace to the wicked in a dying hour. By this is not meant that they shall undergo more pain of body than others. The pangs of dissolution are the same to all. Those, indeed, of whom the world was not worthy, have often suffered the most cruel and violent deaths. Nor is it meant that the wicked have never any composure in death, or hope of well-being hereafter:—For though the scripture tells us, *The wicked is driven away in his wickedness; but the righteous hath hope in his death*; yet we are not to understand, that none of them ever entertain in that solemn hour expectations of mercy, or that they all anticipate their misery. Some of them die as they had lived, stupid and thoughtless as beasts. Besides, I know not that death shakes every false hope. It is thought that some good men may have fears and perplexities to the very last; and that some bad men may remain unshaken, and die with more apparent confidence than the others. There are instances of infidels maintaining cheerfulness and resolution in their last moments. With some it has been otherwise, and they have betrayed dreadful forebodings of a wrath to come. Now and then they have retracted their principles, and sought relief in a profession of Christianity. It is said, that the poet Dryden, not being able to fortify himself in infidelity, embraced the Popish religion. Some years ago it was con-

sidently asserted, that Voltaire, at the age of eighty, and being, as he thought, about to die, had felt some strange qualms of conscience, in consequence of which, he had made a long and goodly confession of the truths of revelation. His followers deem this a slander, and cannot believe that their mighty champion would ever retreat. Having so long edified them by his writings, perhaps there is no sufficient authority to deprive them of their comfort in his death.

The fears of the good man cannot render his state less safe, nor the confidence of the bad render his less dangerous. Whatever their own sentiments are, *it shall be well with the righteous, and ill with the wicked.* We are, however, compassed about with a cloud of witnesses, who bear testimony that the end of the perfect and upright man is peace; who have died, not only with calmness and resignation, but have been filled with a joy unspeakable and full of glory; who have met death, not only on a bed surrounded by friends, but in its most horrid form, on a gibbet, or at a stake; not only those of strong and fearless make, but those of a timorous nature, and from among the weaker sex; not only those who had no attachment on earth why to wish for life, but those who had estates, families and friends. It is an observation made to show the efficacy of grace, that, in suffering times, none went more cheerfully to martyrdom than those who had pumerops families dependent on them. Let the decriers of Religion produce us any principle so powerful to bear one up, under the distresses of life, and support through the valley of the shadow of death, any thing that will so revive and embolden the soul, as a view of God reconciled in Christ, and the hopes of a blessed immortality. No; it is only this will disarm death of his sting. It is this will make death not only tolerable, but desirable; will
give

give not only composure, but triumph; not only free us from pain, but make heaven beam all around us.

Dr Young, in his tract on original composition, has given us a precious anecdote of the amiable Mr Addison. "After he had dismissed his physicians, and all hopes of life, he sent for a youth nearly related to him, and finely accomplished, yet not above being the better for good instructions from a dying friend. He came,—but life now glimmering in the socket, the dying friend was silent. After a decent and proper pause, the youth said, "Dear Sir, you sent for me; I believe and I hope that you have some commands; I shall hold them most sacred." May distant ages not only hear, but feel the reply! Forcibly grasping the young gentleman's hand, he softly said, "See in what peace a Christian can die!"—He spoke with difficulty, and soon expired." I the rather adduce this instance, because he was a man of genius, of great literary fame, and in high station, with which empty smatterers and conceited fools are ready to think Religion inconsistent. Indeed, the men of greatest talents who ever adorned our world, were not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; among whom we may rank a Locke, a Boyle, a Newton, and a Bacon. Perhaps it might be asserted, without extravagance, that these, for strength of mind and deep research, as far exceeded many of the retailers of infidelity as an angel did them; or, as an untutored savage exceeds the beasts below him. They were the glory of Britain, and one half her fame.

What awful spectacles have some of the wicked exhibited on a deathbed! How contrary to the example just now adduced! Hell seemed already to have been kindled in their souls. Under the scourges of a guilty conscience, and a fearful sense of impending wrath, they could not contain, but vented their dismal outcry enough to rend

the stoutest heart. One, of whom mention is made in a practical writer, "a monument of justice, worn to skin and bone, blasphemed the God of heaven, cursed himself, and continually cried, O torture! torture! torture! O torture, torture!" Another is said to have cried out, "I have had a little pleasure, but now I must have hell for ever more." To whatever was spoken to afford him comfort, he replied, "I must to hell; I must to the furnaces of hell for millions of millions of ages." The repetition of these expressions is frightful; how much more to have seen the sad objects! Suffer me to say, with the greatest seriousness and affection, that no sinner who goes on against his conscience can expect to die in another manner. Let not the fright of these examples freeze the blood and make the hair stand on end only, but so impress our minds as to deter us from all the paths of known sin. Should we fall blindfold into destruction, it will not be less terrible in the issue. It must be grievous and distracting to think of appearing before God without some sure and firm hope. To have our peace to make when the body is racked with sore pain, when refreshing sleep has departed, and we know not when the pulse may cease, and we stiffen into cold clay,—how affecting, and alas, what prospect that the mighty work shall be done, when years of health and strength have been sinned away! I leave this mournful theme, but for one more mournful still. There is,

In the last place, No peace to the wicked after death. Then their sorrows begin, which admit of no alleviation. In this world they had their good things: They enjoyed with others the common bounties of Providence, and were sensible of pleasure. In these they placed their only happiness; but now all is gone, and they are tormented. Conscience can be quieted no more. It is the worm that
never

never dies. Instead of hope, eternal despair covers them round, and they are pressed under the wrath of a just and sovereign Judge. Before the body is conveyed to its cold lodging by surviving friends, the immortal spirit is sentenced and confined to that dismal dungeon which justice hath prepared for all the rebellious; where are,

“Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace
And rest can never dwell, hope never comes
That comes to all; but torture without end
Still urges, and a fiery deluge, fed
With ever-burning sulphur unconsum’d.

— Here their prison ordain’d
In utter darkness, and their portion set,
As far remov’d from God and light of Heav’n
As from the centre thrice to th’ utmost pole *.”

Who is able to describe their misery? Who knows the power and vengeance of Almighty God? Future punishment is represented in scripture by the *worm that never dies*, by *everlasting fire*, by a *lake of fire and brimstone*, and by every thing terrible in nature.

That there will be degrees of misery our Saviour has taught us, when he says, that it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, for Sodom and Gomorrah, than for Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum, in the day of judgment, because these enjoyed superior advantages to the others. These words also teach the same: *This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light*. It shall be more tolerable for the heathen world, than for those under the Gospel. Wickedness indeed grows to a greater height among the latter. Would you find the most daring and abandoned sinner? look not for him among the Indian tribes, but among professing Christians.—Nothing can ex-

ceed the anguish arising from the reflection of having slighted offered mercy. This is a misery from which the devils themselves will be exempted. To them no Saviour has been revealed, nor pardon offered. Skilled in the art of torment, they will increase the anguish of our race by insulting their folly. The body having been a partner in guilt, will be reunited to the soul, and both made unspeakably miserable. Our Saviour concludes his awful representation of the day of judgment, by saying, *These shall go away into everlasting punishment.*

The character and misery of the wicked having been now set before us, surely it becomes us to make careful and serious application of these truths.

We see the unhappy condition of such, notwithstanding our political war is turned into peace. To rejoice in it, most certainly they ought, but by no means to view it as an evidence that God is pleased with them. Without repentance, they are only reserved for severer judgments. The dispensations of Providence towards mankind in this world are various, and all designed to bring them to a sense of themselves, and an acknowledgment of the living and true God. He tries us now with affliction, and then with mercy, or he mixes the cup. They who *harden their necks shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.* They who have felt the distresses of the war, and have not wept for their sins; those who have lost their estates, and have not made peace with God, have reason more than ever to fear. There is yet no peace to them. They are not immediately threatened, it is true, with an invading army, or called to change domestic bliss for the hurry of a camp, and jeopard their lives in the high places of the field. They no longer tremble for dear relatives, and sigh for life, liberty and property at stake, but they lie under the displeasure

displeasure of that Almighty Being, who disposes of them and all their concerns. He hath other ways to punish them even in this world; and they shall not escape his righteous judgment in the world to come. What are all the scenes of terror and confusion we can witness here, compared to that place, where shall be continual *weeping and gnashing of teeth*.

Is it not then of the utmost importance, that we examine whether or not we are numbered with the wicked? If ever we would obtain mercy of God in Christ, we must first be acquainted with our own condition. As some disorders are of the most deadly nature, in which the patients are stupid and insensible of pain, so a sinner not knowing himself to be such, and unconcerned, affords but little ground of hope.—Are any of you living in ignorance of divine truths, seldom thinking or caring about them? Are you guilty of great immoralities, secret or open? Do you live in the omission of positive and known duty? How then can you hope that your state is good and safe? Your state is beyond all doubt bad and dangerous.—Believe it to be so, and labour after repentance and amendment.—Neither will a life faultless in the eyes of men, and a regular attendance on outward duties, prove you the subjects of supernatural grace. He is a Christian who is one inwardly. The seat of piety is the heart. If you believe the doctrine of man's depravity and inability, you must, in connection, believe the necessity of being created anew in Christ Jesus. As is the tree, so is the fruit: As is the fountain, so are the streams. Have you then passed from death to life? There is no medium. Either you have been changed, or you are at this day, *in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity*. Hear the words of Him who came down from Heaven to teach us the way of life: *Verily, verily*

I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Alas, that too many, like Nicodemus, think this a strange and unintelligible doctrine. They allege, that nothing more is necessary than those endeavours and desires which are in their own power. They feel no need of the influences of the Holy Spirit. O Religion, mysterious in thy nature, giving glory to God, and debasing the creature, may we never mistake thee, our eternal concern! Blessed God, dispel the darkness of our minds; give us to know thee, and what we ourselves are, and lead us in the way everlasting!

Our deceitful hearts are too apt to impose upon us, and our adversary the devil, is ever seeking whom he may devour. The most wicked person flatters himself, that he will some time or other mend, or presumes on the mercy of God.—Let us try to make a thorough work of religion. Many who were *not far from the kingdom of Heaven*, will never arrive there. The formalist must lose his soul after all his pains. He needs the new heart to turn his drudgery into a willing service, and make him happy for ever. The hypocrite, if renewed in the spirit of his mind, will not act the player, or assume a borrowed character; but he will really be what he appears to be. How vain are all pretences! It is easy to deceive fellow-men; but God, with whom we have to do, searches the heart and tries the reins. What we are in secret, when none but his eyes sees us, will determine our true character.

Sinners, of whatever description, open your eyes on your wretchedness! Flattery in your case would be poison. To hide your danger, or smooth it over, would be monstrous cruelty. Do you ask, Is there no hope concerning us? None while you continue in sin. There is no such salvation in all the Scriptures. If you are resolved

solved and permitted to go on in a course of iniquity till the end of life, you are condemned already. *The wages of sin is death.* Nothing but the slight union of soul and body prevents the flames of hell from kindling all around you. On this precarious tenure you hold any ease and peace you have. A few days sickness may end all your joy for ever; a sickness in which you may be insensible, and can no more attend to the salvation of the soul, than one already in the grave; nay an accident may precipitate you into everlasting burnings. You now live, and have health and reason. If you will leave your sins, there is an ample remedy provided for you in the Gospel. There is salvation for the worst of you, for all of you. O delay not, but break off your sins by righteousness. Be importunate in prayer to God. Bring your polluted soul and body to the blood of Christ, which *cleanseth from all sin.*—Now is your day of grace; sin it not away. The moments are on the wing.—Improve them before they are fled, and you go down to the dust.

You, my brethren, who have your peace made with God, are happy indeed. I congratulate you on the peace restored to our land; but I congratulate you much more on this. By the one, the calamities of war are removed, and days of ease and rest are come; by the other, you have escaped calamities without end, and have found rest to your souls. By the one, you are freed from the oppressive yoke of men; by the other, from the vilest slavery of sin and Satan. By the one, you have prospects of a growing and extensive empire; by the other, assurance of reigning for ever and ever. You are doubly blessed. Peace without and peace within. Peace here, and peace hereafter. You must not, however, put off the harness. In your spiritual concerns, much remains yet to be done. This warfare is not over. Sin and Satan,

though wounded, are not dead ; though sorely beaten, they keep the field. Hostilities may cease ; but they will be renewed. It is your duty, therefore, to watch, and to put on the whole armour of God. You have the greatest encouragement to stand your ground. You will prove successful, through the strength of your Leader. Jesus Christ will make you more than conquerors.

Exert all your talents, and use all your influence, to promote the declarative glory of God, and the salvation of men. Discouragement, and as far as in your power, prevent idleness of every kind, excess and profanity, so displeasing to God, and destructive to free and popular governments. We have been brave, and, if virtuous, we will be a happy people.

I conclude this discourse with addressing, once more, those of my audience, who may be sensible that they have no peace with God. It were easy to multiply arguments why you should return to God ; but none will prevail unless He make them effectual. I have endeavoured to deal plainly and faithfully with you, as knowing that I must give an account. It would be improper to preach my soul away in a smooth and moral harangue. Your own good sense would condemn me for it now, and rise up in judgment against me in the day of the Lord. Have you formed any resolutions, that you will try to be religious ? Begin and persevere. You have the greatest encouragement. Let neither the number, nor the aggravation of your crimes, deter you from an application to the Saviour. On the contrary, if sin be your choice, there is no encouragement. How do you know that God will not leave you to yourselves, to fill up the measure of your iniquity ? How do you know that he will not speedily require your souls ? Let not a moment then pass without resolving to serve God. Why halt
you

you between two opinions? Reason and conscience say, that you ought to be religious. Follow their wise and sovereign dictate. What pretences does sin bring? She puts on a specious appearance to deceive and ruin. Hearken not to her song, for she would entice you to your own destruction. In the end, she will bite like a serpent, and sting like an adder. She rewards all her votaries with unutterable wo and pain. But religion holds out to you every thing good and great. She will perfect and make happy your nature. Through Jesus Christ you may obtain peace with God, and with your own consciences; peace in death, and throughout eternity. Why will you not, this day, accept and sign the peace through this Mediator? This would give you a true relish for all the gifts of Providence. Then might you *fit every man under his vine, and under his fig-tree, and none make you afraid*. May God teach us all our true interest; long continue our national peace; and above all, give us peace with himself, and make us happy, when thrones shall be cast down; through Jesus Christ, to whom, with the Father, and the blessed Spirit, one God, be glory now and forever more.

S E R M O N XIV.**THE NATURE AND ADVANTAGES OF
THE FEAR OF THE LORD.****BY****JOHN RODGERS, D.D.**

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PROV. xxiii. 17.*Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long.*

THERE is scarce any thing that has a more immediate influence upon our duty or our comfort, than the due government of the passions: When they are properly directed, they serve as powerful springs of right action; but unguided by reason and revelation, they are the fruitful sources of vice, guilt, and ruin.

Hence the wise and virtuous, in all ages, have employed themselves in forming rules for their regulation. But it has been found more easy to prescribe, than to reduce these rules to practice.

Herein

Herein then, the religion of Jesus has the advantage over every other system of morality, in that it not only prescribes the most just and proper rules for this end, but provides the assistance that is requisite to enable us to comply with them.

This is the special business of the Spirit of grace, in the œconomy of man's salvation; and directed and assisted by him, we are enabled to *be, and walk in the fear of the Lord all the day long*, agreeably to the precept in our text.

To enable you to understand and improve this important precept, in a proper manner, I shall endeavour, by the aids of this Spirit,

I. To shew you what it is to be in the fear of the Lord all the day long.

II. Enquire why we should study thus to be in the fear of the Lord.

I. I am briefly to shew you what it is to be in the fear of the Lord all the day long.

Fear is a passion of the human mind, and stands opposed to hope. It is that passion by which the author of nature guards us against danger; and in this view, when properly directed, is of singular use in the conduct of life. It always has for its object some evil, real or supposed; and in the words of our text, with many other places in sacred scripture, its immediate object is *the evil and danger of sinning against God; and the just displeasure of God, in consequence of offending him*. To fear these, is to fear the Lord in the best sense of the phrase. This is the sense in which the churches are said to *walk in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost*.

And

And in the same sense, *the fear of the Lord, is said to be the beginning of wisdom.*

But, to give you a fuller view of this grace, I beg your attention while I briefly observe,

1. That it implies a *humble reverence for God*.—A sense of his being, perfections and character; *that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him.* That he is a God *of purer eyes than to behold evil.* There is no view of God that contributes more to form the human heart to a true fear of him, and a devout reverence for him, than a believing view of the holiness of his nature. This is the case of the *angels themselves*, as we learn from Isaiah vi. 1.—3. *I saw also, the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims; each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!*

There cannot be a more lively description of reverence and godly fear, than that given us in the conduct of the seraphim, verse 2. You will please to observe, each one of these adoring spirits had six wings. *With twain they covered their faces*—struck with the Majesty of God, and unable to behold his glory; *and with twain they covered their feet*—as unworthy to stand in his sacred presence, though immaculate; and the highest order of rational creatures known to us; *and with twain they did fly*—importing the alacrity, cheerfulness and expedition with which they execute the Divine commands. And the source of this reverence, humility and obedience, we have, verse 3. It was the view they had of the holiness of the Divine nature. *For one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy,*

holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!

A like effect of the like view of this same attribute, we have in the conduct of the four living creatures, and the four and twenty elders; of whom we read in the 4th chapter of the Revelation of St John, from the 8th to the 11th verse.—

A knowledge of the greatness and majesty of God, has also no small instrumentality in promoting this temper. This appears in the case of the prophet Jeremiah, x. 6, 7. *Forasmuch as there is none like unto thee, O Lord; thou art great, and thy name is great in might. Who would not fear thee, O King of nations? To the same purpose are the words of the Psalmist: For the Lord is great, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all Gods.*

He is also a God of strict and invariable justice. A God who will punish iniquity, transgression and sin; and who will by no means clear the guilty, without an interest in the atonement of the Mediator.

If you add to all this, that Jehovah is an all-seeing and a heart-searching God, you will easily perceive that this reverence, this godly fear, justly becomes us: And few of the Divine attributes have a more powerful influence on this temper than his omniscience, when properly understood and realized. That *the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth—discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart; and, that there is not any creature that is not manifest in his sight; but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.* That no darkness can hide from him. That the shades of midnight, and the blaze of noon are the same thing to him. A sense of our being always under the immediate eye of this God, from whom nothing can be

hid, naturally tends to beget and cherish this fear of the Lord in our hearts; to fill us with that reverence for his majesty, that enters so deeply into the duty enjoined in our text. On the other hand, ignorance of God, and inattention to these perfections of his nature, especially to his omniscience and omnipresence, are among the most fruitful sources of that irreverence for him, which stands opposed to the grace I describe. The language of the sinner's heart and life is, *How doth God know? Can he judge through the dark cloud? Thick clouds are a covering to him, that he seeth not, and he walketh in the circuit of heaven.* He may not, indeed, venture to say it with his lips, but he daily saith by his practice, *the Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it.* And, by the by, this irreverence for God is the true source of that rude and unworthy practice of profane swearing. A practice that insults all the laws of politeness, and renders the man unfit for genteel society, while it violates the most sacred obligations of piety and morality.

2. The fear of the Lord implies, *an habitual care lest we offend him.* This is the genuine effect of that reverence for God, of which you have just heard. The more it prevails in the heart, the more will it govern and influence the life.—The true source of this care is a sincere love to God, and a desire to please him. The man who does not love God, and desire to please him, will not be careful, on just principles, to guard against giving him offence. Why does the dutiful child fear to offend a kind and tender parent? Is it not because he loves him? because his honour lies near his heart? Thus in the case before us, the more we love God and his law, the more cautious and tender shall we be, lest we sin against him.—And this circumspection serves, not only as a guard against the commission of sin, but it has a powerful influence

fluence also upon the performance of duty. It stimulates the man who fears the Lord, to a conscientious and faithful discharge of the whole of his duty, to the utmost of his power. It guards him against omitting it in the season thereof; and engages him to attend, not only to the matter, but to the manner of his performing it.

In a word, this habitual care, this circumspection of conduct, that we do not omit our duty to God, our neighbour, or ourselves; that we perform it in the proper time and manner; and that we do not knowingly and wilfully sin against God, is literally to *be in the fear of the Lord all the day long*, and is one principal thing the Holy Spirit intends by the precept in our text.

3. This fear of the Lord has for its object, *the just displeasure of God, as due to us for sin.*

That we have sinned against God, and hereby merited his highest displeasure, are melancholy truths, that do not, cannot admit of a doubt. And hence those numerous evils that have so universally overspread this world of ours; such as sickness and pain, war and famine, poverty, disgrace, and death itself; and together with these, our being justly liable to be *punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power*. Moral and natural evil are inseparably connected, and the latter never fails to follow the former, in a greater or less degree. And since we are sinners, and conscious to ourselves that we are so, we justly fear the Divine displeasure due to us therefor. Thus the Psalmist — *My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments*. Not to fear the judgments of God in this situation, would be unpardonable stupidity, or a profane contempt of God. And this fear has its influence too on the purity of the life, as it tends to guard us against sin,

and is, therefore, one thing implied in the text—*Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long.*

But it is necessary to distinguish here, between that slavish fear of God's judgments, that destroys our peace of mind, and hereby incapacitates us for the duties and enjoyments of life, and that which only serves to guard us against sin. The former is that of which we read, 1 John iv. 18. *There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear; because fear bath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.* It is a slavish fear of God's wrath, a despairing horror of his judgments, of which the Apostle there speaks. This is that which persons under the power of a melancholy habit of body and mind, sometimes have; and which also is the fear of those who despair of the mercy of God in Christ. But this is not the fear which I at present describe. It is only that fear of the Divine displeasure against sin, that serves to awaken our attention to its evil nature, and thereby guard us against committing it.

Thus much for the nature of that fear of the Lord of which we here read.

It only remains under this head that we enquire, what it is to be in the fear of the Lord *all the day long?*

And this in general means, that we should live under the habitual influence of this holy temper; that we should carry it with us into all the duties of the religious and social life, whether of a more private or public nature; that we carry it with us into all the businesses and amusements of common life, into all companies and circumstances. We are hereby taught, that there is no situation in which we can be, no employment in which we may be engaged, but what we should constantly act under the influence of this fear of the Lord. It should rise with us in the morning, go forth with us, attend us through

through all the various scenes of the day, and lie down with us at night. And this should be the case with us through all the days and nights of our appointed time. Thus, *be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long*; the whole day of life, for the night of death will shortly come, and put a final period to it. This is the sense in which, *bappy is the man that feareth alway; but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief.*

This leads us to enquire—

II. Why should we study to be in the fear of the Lord all the day long?

My business, under this head, is to mention some of the many reasons why we should be particularly attentive to this duty. And let it suffice, briefly, to touch upon the four following at present.

I. *It is an excellent guard against the commission of sin*; that sin which constitutes our depravity, and which is the fruitful source of all our misery. This appears, at first sight, from what has been said of its nature. Can the man knowingly and deliberately sin against God, who has a suitable sense of his being, his perfections, his character and his government upon his spirit? No, the very idea of his being under the immediate eye of that God, who serves as a solemn witness to all his transactions; a holy and a just God, to whom he must shortly give an account of all the deeds done in the body; would check his career and deter him from sin. Think you, my brethren, that the debauchee who gives himself up to idleness and profane company; who wastes whole days, and it may be nights, in the tavern, at the gaming table, or in places of a still more infamous character, that he can have the fear of God before his eyes? Verily no. It is because he is destitute of this principle, that the sinner re-

strains prayer before God; that he dares to take his sacred name, in a profane manner, in his unhallowed lips; that he dares to get drunk; commit uncleanness; lie; profane the Sabbath of the Lord; steal, or otherwise defraud his neighbour. The fear of the Lord would effectually engage him to forsake these and every other vicious course. It would strip temptation of its charms, and disarm it of its force.

Hence the fear of the Lord, and departing from evil, are used as phrases of the same import. *Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.* And we read, *The fear of the Lord is to hate evil.* And, *by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil.* This is the sense in which *the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever.* It not only deters us from sin, and guards us against it; but, as has been already suggested, it excites and stimulates us to study a thorough conformity in heart and life, to the approving will of God. Hence the Apostle exhorts us, *to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord.*

2. *It greatly assists us in the right performance of duty.* I mean here the duties we owe more immediately to the Most High God. These, my brethren, are numerous and important. They are secret, private, and public. They are to be performed in the closet, the family, and the sanctuary; nor is it possible for us to be the true disciples of Christ, without a conscientious attendance upon them. And you will further please to observe, God justly requires they should be performed in a humble and devout, a spiritual and sincere manner. This our Lord teaches us with great care: *God is a Spirit; and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth.* But to all this, the fear of the Lord, as already described, greatly

ly contributes. For in proportion as this fear or reverence towards God prevails in us, will the heart be fixed upon him, the glorious object of our worship, in every duty. In proportion hereto, we shall be guarded against those vain and wandering thoughts that eat out the very soul of our duties, and degrade them into empty formality. God requires, with great solemnity, *My Son, give me thine heart.* A precept that particularly binds us in this case of duty; for our God looketh at the heart principally in all our approaches to him; and, indeed, he has a special respect to it in all our conduct.

Again: It greatly tends to invigorate the graces of the Spirit in the soul, and to call them forth into lively exercise. The more this fear of God governs the man, the more active and vigorous will his graces be. For the same views of the perfections, character and Christ of God, that are the source of the one, will promote the other. Our time does not admit of shewing you here how this is effected. It must suffice at present to observe, that so it is; and you will easily perceive how a spirit of devotion is hereby promoted. For the proper exercise of faith, hope, love to God, and delight in him in duty, is that in which this spirit consists. But the more this is in exercise, the more easy, delightful and spiritual will our duties be.

3. This fear of the Lord *excites us to the important duty of watchfulness, and greatly assists therein.* There is no duty of the Christian life more frequently and strongly enjoined in the sacred oracles than this. You hear our Lord say, Matt. xxvi. 41. *Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.* And again: *And what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch.* To this purpose are the words of the Apostle: *Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.—Continue in prayer, and*

watch in the same with thanksgiving. To which accords his exhortation to Timothy: *But watch thou in all things.* And did our time admit of considering here the many snares to which God's own people are exposed in this life; snares that arise from the temptations of Satan, the allurements of the world, and the depraved tempers and passions of the human heart, you would easily perceive the utility, importance and necessity of this duty. There are none of all the duties of the Christian life, that have a more immediate and powerful influence on the peace of our own minds, or our conformity to God. It must, therefore, be a singular favour to be properly excited to it, and assisted in the exercise of it. But this is the office of that fear of the Lord which our text enjoins, as appears from what has been said of its nature. For the man who fears the Lord in the manner explained, will not only watch against every kind of sin, but also those circumstances of temptation that lead to it.

4. *God recommends this duty to our study and practice, by his Divine authority.*—This he does by the high encomiums he bestows upon it, and that with this express view. It is *wisdom*, it is *understanding*. Thus in Job: *Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil, is understanding.* And in Proverbs: *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge*; or, as the Hebrew word will well admit of being rendered, it is the *principal, or grand constituent part of true knowledge*. And again: *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; and the knowledge of the holy, is understanding. The fear of the Lord is strong confidence; and his children shall have a place of refuge. The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.* Add to all this, the duty before us is matter of express command,

mand, as in our text. *Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long.*

Need I say more to recommend it to your study and practice? Would you wish to enjoy the comforts that flow from the purity of heart, and innocence of manners, which it promotes?—Would you wish to live a life of holy and delightful intercourse with heaven, and be useful in your day and generation? Would you wish to grow daily into a greater meetness *for the inheritance of the saints in light*? In a word, would you wish to die in peace, and go to be ever with the Lord? *Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long.* And for this purpose I beseech you,

1. Study to acquire more and more of the knowledge of God; the knowledge of his perfections, character, and government; especially as they are manifested in and through his Son Jesus Christ. What has been already said, shews the influence this knowledge has on this fear of the Lord. It is its true source. Thus it becomes *life eternal to know God, as the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent.*

2. Be much and frequent in meditating upon the Divine perfections. Call up their various and numerous displays to your daily recollection, and dwell in familiar contemplation upon them. Thus your souls will be assimilated to them; acquire correspondent tempers and dispositions; the tempers and dispositions to which these displays of the attributes of God, are designed and calculated to form the human heart. This is one thing imported in having *our conversation in heaven, from whence we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.* And the so general neglect of this great duty of meditation, is one of the fruitful sources of that little improvement in the divine life, of which so many of God's people daily and justly

justly complain; why they live and act so much beneath the dignity of their character, as the disciples of a Holy Jesus; and often act so unworthy the just expectations of both their God and the world respecting them.

3. Be much in the great duty of prayer, especially be conscientious in observing the returning seasons thereof, private and social.—This has a natural tendency to impress our spirits with that reverence for the Divine perfections and character, that enters so deeply into the duty before us. And not only so, but in this way we are to seek, and in this way we may hope to obtain, those influences of the Spirit of grace, by which this fear of the Lord is most effectually maintained and promoted in the hearts and lives of men. My brethren, if you do not make conscience of this duty, in your closets and families, such of you as have families, you cannot live in the fear of the Lord. Therefore I beseech you, *continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving.*

Lastly, To the duty of prayer, add that of watchfulness. You have just heard the influence this duty has on our personal conformity to God; I need not repeat it. Watch therefore your own hearts; attend to what passes there.

Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life. Watch your lips, that you speak not unadvisedly therewith; watch your lives, that you do not offend against God's pure and holy law; *watch thou in all things, and thus be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long.*

May the Lord graciously enable each of us, thus to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord; through riches of free grace in Christ our Lord. Amen.

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SERMON XV.

**ON THE CONNECTION BETWEEN PIETY
AND RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE.**

BY

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JOHN vii. 17.

*If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine,
whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.*

AT the time when our Saviour commenced his public ministry, the Jewish nation were expecting the promised Messiah. There were some traits in the character of Jesus of Nazareth, which, on particular occasions, commanded the attention, and even the applause of the people; but, through an unhappy misconception of their prophecies, they had long entertained an idea, that when the Messiah came, he would assume the rank and power of a temporal prince, emancipate their nation, and exalt it to the highest degree of political glory. Very contrary to this were the views and professions of Christ himself;

so that, notwithstanding the purity of his conversation, the amiableness of his life, and the lustre of his example, he passed the greatest part of his days under the most pointed notices of neglect and scorn. In the perusal of the sacred history, the sympathetic heart is wounded by the insults he received from those whose duty and interest were to have bid him welcome as their benefactor and friend; and every patron of true science is ready to recoil at the representation, that *he*, who was emphatically the instructor of mankind, and great light of the world, should be considered as one who perverted knowledge, and was actually engaged in deceiving the people.

This contumely, however, was by no means universal; for whilst there were many who opposed, and even sought to kill him, others were so frank as to say, *When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these, which this man hath done?*

By the context, we are informed of a particular conversation which Jesus had with the Jews on this interesting subject. His remarks are few, but admirably well applied. For the proofs of his mission from heaven, he refers them to his works; but previously declares, that if they would do the will of his Father, they should know of the doctrine which he preached, whether it was of God, or whether he spake of himself. This in substance is the same as if he had said, that if, from virtuous desires to serve their Maker, they made enquiry concerning his personal character and profession, they should escape all danger of deception by him; and, with the advantages they enjoyed, be readily able to discern, whether he was an impostor who preached in his own name, and was endeavouring to palm on them a doctrine which had no foundation in truth; or, whether he spake as the messenger

ger sent from God, and respecting things which were of infinite weight.

As it is evident the same observation may, in all ages, apply to the various nations or classes of men by whom the Bible is perused, it will be natural to consider the text, as containing in it an unequivocal acknowledgment of a real *connection existing between piety and religious knowledge*; and intended to promote the contemplation and belief of the serious doctrine.

The design in the following discourse is, therefore, to illustrate the principles on which this connection depends, in order to shew that every pious and good man is entitled to a full persuasion, that, in the use of proper endeavours, he may, at all times, acquire a competent knowledge of religious truth; and this, whether he examines the scriptures in their high claim of a Divine revelation, or, as I shall have reference to, in a more particular manner contemplates them as including a system of doctrines, the belief of which among Christians is essential to salvation.

In the *first place*, This connection will appear, if we consider the influence of the affections on the human judgment.

There is something in moral truth most admirably congenial with the taste and temper of the good man. It is the food by which his soul is nourished, as much as the body is by meat and drink: In proportion to the degree acquired, it improves in greatness, and takes its rank in the happy world of minds. The reason of this is immediately seen, on the recollection that moral truth is friendly and conducive to moral virtue. Such is the complexion of the sacred writings, in which the laws and doctrines are eminently according to true godliness. In enjoining holiness and condemning sin, in proffering pardon to the penitent, but pronouncing the impenitent to

be obnoxious to Divine anger, they embrace the feelings of each reformed person, who humbly longs for the benediction of God, at the same time that they reproach the refractory and hardened sinner. On this account they are studied by the one, but more generally avoided by the other. As the polished steel or common mirror represents the form and features of each one who beholds it, so the word of God exhibits to the reader the features or complection of his soul. The good man rejoices in the image; for, however faintly, it is really the image of his Maker, and must of consequence be beautiful. The bad man starts back with shame: He is ready to suspect the justness of the mirror; and perceiving the vast contrast between the amiableness of moral rectitude, and the disordered state of his own mind, he cometh not to the light, fearing the pains which are annexed to self-reproof and condemnation.

Thus may it readily be understood, that the friend of virtue may invariably obtain advantage in the important business of discerning religious truth. The integrity of his mind will not fail to attach him to those doctrines which are commendatory of true holiness,—explain their nature, and convince him they are right. Though an angel from heaven should proclaim any other, he would not receive them. What are immaculate in kind, and beneficial in effect, he will view as possessing the signatures of Divine authenticity, and be immediately prepared to admit that the messenger who brings them can come from none but God.

It was on this principle that our Saviour addressed the Jews in the words of the text: And on this principle, every religious person may be assured that, admitting the writings of the Old and New Testaments to be authentic, he shall not only be preserved from dangerous mistakes respecting

respecting their doctrines, but acquire a sufficient knowledge of all the truths included in them, which are essential to salvation.

Secondly, The same sentiment will be further illustrated and confirmed, if, in perusing the sacred Scriptures, we consider their general completion and design.

It is presumed to be a well established point, that they contain an infallible rule for life, adapted to the various circumstances of men, and sufficient in all things to answer the end of introducing penitents to a state of reconciliation and acceptance with God. This being the case, are we not to suppose, that the primary doctrines, on the hearty belief of which the salvation of the reader turns, are really very *few*, and likewise very *comprehensible* and *plain*?

The Bible may emphatically be characterized a message of good news to men in general. As such, it comprises in its composition a serious address to the unlearned, as well as the learned; and to children or youth, as really as to those of riper years. It could not, however, be described in this style, if its first principles or essential truths were either very considerable in number, or in nature so obscure as to require of those who examined them a course of years, aided by no small strength of genius, before they could be understood. How many examples have we known of firm believers in revelation, and pious Christians, where their natural capacities or degrees of acquired knowledge have even been proverbially small? That there is one infinitely powerful, wise, and good God,—that this glorious Being has made known his will to men, and in particular informed them of his disposition to forgive their sins,—that he has even promised this through the Messiah, on their repentance, reformation, and grateful belief in his word,—that there is another world,—

world,—will be a general resurrection and future judgment by Jesus Christ, the head over all things to the Church;—these are points of which every serious and upright man may readily be convinced, without the aids of human learning and philosophy: He who reads may comprehend them; and yet, obvious as they appear, they at least so far include the fundamentals of Religion, as that he who cordially believes them, however unenlightened, as may providentially be the case in other heads of doctrine, shall certainly be saved.

To prevent misconceptions, let it be observed, that when I say the essential truths of the Bible, and in particular of the New Testament, are both few and plain, I would add, they are not the less important on this account.—When Columbus was sent from Europe in search of other countries, and returned with the relation of the discovery of America, then called the new world, the fact declared was perfectly obvious. Every person could understand it. But it was as truly important as if its comprehension had required the utmost stretch of mental genius. Thus it is with a great part of the doctrines of the Gospel: They contain discoveries or revelations from heaven to mankind, respecting things which otherwise would have been unknown: But however important in their nature, yet, when once revealed, they are as intelligible as most other truths with which the human mind is commonly conversant.

Another observation may be of consequence here, which is, that however plain and intelligible the principal truth of revealed religion may be deemed, there are, notwithstanding, many others connected with them, and equally belonging to the system, in the study of which, the talents of the Christian philosopher may find ample employment through the whole period of human life.

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Even in the defence of the Gospel as a Divine revelation, in reply to the objections offered by professed sceptics, a degree of genius and fund of knowledge may be requisite, when the unlearned Christian may be in no want of what is necessary for the support and comfort of his own mind; but knowing how desirable it is that there should actually be such a revelation,—contemplating the news of pardon which it brings to the abounding honour of Divine grace, and at the same time perceiving his soul to be attracted in love and praise to God for the ineffable gift, it is possible for him, in a good degree, to attain the same persuasion of its authenticity, as if an angel were dispatched from above renewedly to preach it to him. In the article of knowledge there will always be a wide difference among Christians, whilst their capacities and means for improvement continue to be dissimilar. It is, however, eminently characteristic of the Scriptures, that they embrace a system of truths, in which the *wisdom*, as well as *goodness* of God, harmoniously unite. The angels desire to look into them. They open to the intellectual eye, a prospect as transportingly extensive as it is beautiful and fine; and will probably serve to the saints as the essential principles or first rudiments of knowledge, to assist their enquiring minds through eternity itself. We have sufficient reason to believe that a capital object in the gospel plan is to improve our *mental* as well as *moral* powers,—to make us *wise* as well as *virtuous*,—*great* as well as *good*,—and exalt our pleasures by the increase of *knowledge* as assuredly as by the increase of *grace*.

Nor is this to be considered solely as a distant object, or having a limited relation to our existence in the future world. Frequently it is realized in the present. As far as Newton excelled more humble scholars in researches

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into the laws of the natural world, so far do many Christian philosophers surpass great numbers of their brethren, soaring in intellectual enquiries, as the eagle in his flight above the common birds, that perch upon the branches. *He* truly is a very indifferent Christian who wishes not to improve in religious knowledge, and affords but slender evidence of the cordiality of his faith, when he neglects to apply himself to the study of the Gospel, so far as his means and ability will admit. Is it not more than probable, that the happiness of good men in heaven, will be in great proportion to the degrees of their acquired knowledge of the Scriptures on earth? To this consideration it may be added, that next to piety, there is nothing more essential than knowledge, to the tranquillity of the believer in the present life. By enriching his mind with just ideas of God, it elevates his spirits;—preserves him from the illusions of religious melancholy and despair;—shews him in what manner he must live, and teaches him how to die, in humble confidence in the redemption of the Gospel, and in hope of a glorious resurrection to everlasting joy.

The complexion of these sentiments, it may possibly be thought is dissimilar to what was exhibited in the commencement of this head of discourse. In maintaining, that the essential truths of Christianity were few and plain, it seemed necessary however to treat the subject in some measure at large, and consider the system of Divine revelation in the several degrees of light in which it may properly be viewed, by the different minds employed in its contemplation,

I confess for myself, that I receive a strong impression in favour both of the authenticity and excellency of the Gospel, when I find it to contain a suitable address to men in all conditions whatever, and to be equally operative

tive of the salvation of the learned and unlearned, on the terms which it describes. If it were a message only to the learned, requiring either great time or talents for the comprehension of its fundamental principles, it could not be esteemed to be a *universal* blessing. If to the unlearned only,—that is, if it included no other truths but what might be fully perceived and understood immediately, and by all persons alike, it would seem to be wanting in the signatures of dignity and strength. By accommodating its blessings to the circumstances of both, it more fully corresponds with our ideas of the benignity of its Author, and appears to be eminently calculated to answer the design for which it was given, which is, to bring all the virtuous, the humble and the faithful, whatever may be their conditions in other particulars, into a state of favour with Heaven, and the complete enjoyment of eternal redemption.—Conforming to this design, we are to conclude, sufficient care has been taken that its primary doctrines, on the belief of which the enjoyment of salvation depends, should decidedly be within the reach and compass of every rational mind to which they are addressed. Were the certainty of a reception to the Divine favour and blessing, supposed to turn essentially at any period of the world, on the degrees of knowledge to be acquired, innumerable difficulties would rise to view, for which it would not be easy to find a solution. It might be asked, how it happens that this, by no means, has been a constant and universal rule? In what manner then shall we account for the facts, that the ancient patriarchs were saved, when they entertained very few ideas respecting the intended Messiah;—that the pious class of Jews obtained acceptance, though their religious economy and worship was confessedly imperfect;—and that the disciples of our Lord were assured of his favour, when,

until the time that he actually rose from the dead, they appear to have been greatly unacquainted with the chief end of his mission into the world? In reality, they are accounted for on this obvious principle, and no other, viz. that piety is before knowledge in the estimation of the Divine mind;—they prove that in the plan of grace, devised long before the Messiah came, it has uniformly been the object to which the Almighty has had a primary respect in the distribution of his favours;—they confirm us in the sentiment, that the same degrees of piety, in every age will be accepted;—the conclusion we are to draw from all which is, that the belief of what is necessary to salvation, according to the Gospel-scheme, is perfectly attainable by every humble, sincere, and enquiring mind.

This brings me to observe, in the *last* place, That the certainty of each person's attaining the degree of knowledge which is essential to salvation, is confirmed by the explicit promises made in the Gospel to this effect.

Of this nature is the text. In a direct view, it is a promise that all good people, who do the will of God, shall know whether the Scriptures are from Heaven, or not. But surely no person will be ready to allow the influence of piety in directing to the discovery of the authenticity of the Scriptures, and yet deny the same influence in promoting an acquaintance with the leading articles which they contain.

There are, however, many passages of the New Testament, in which *the knowledge of the truth* is expressly promised by our Saviour through the teaching of the Holy Spirit. It must be confessed, that the greatest part of these have an appropriated reference to the Apostles of our Lord, by whom the New Testament was written, when they were miraculously inspired. In many of them

them there are, notwithstanding, perspicuous intimations to private Christians universally, that if they apply to God, with proper dispositions, he will teach them what is needful. Not that they are to expect a communication of knowledge, in the intuitive or miraculous manner which was experienced by the Apostles. Vast mistakes, it is well known, have often existed in the Christian world, on this subject; nor have examples been wanting of different sectaries in religion, as well as different persons, who have equally supposed themselves to have been taught by the Spirit, when the doctrines they have professed to maintain under this instruction, have been wholly contradictory of each other.

But admitting the affections, as we have already seen, to have an influence on the human judgment, and in great degree to direct the views of the understanding, it appears to be perfectly consonant to reason, as it surely is to revelation, that the improvement of the mind in religious science, should follow as the natural consequence of its improvement in moral virtue. Without judging, therefore, of the particular degree, in which the private Christian may expect the aids of the Spirit, to illuminate and confirm him in the belief of the truth, I conceive the fact in general may be pleaded for, on the same principle that we admit the sanctification of every believer's heart to be through the good will, and animating power of that God, who, as he governs in the kingdoms of Providence and nature, according to the wisest laws, and in perfect harmony with the moral agency of his subjects, has an indubitable right to govern, in the same manner, in the great and glorious kingdom of grace. Encouraged by this thought, *If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given to him.*

Having thus endeavoured to explain the doctrine in the text, and illustrate the principles on which it is founded, there are now several deductions which come to view, on account of their intimate connection with the subject; to which will you permit me, in the following part of the discourse, to request your candid attention.

The *first* is, that as every man, agreeably to common consent, is accountable to Almighty God for his moral affections; so, for the same reasons, he is accountable to him for his religious sentiments and opinions.

I am well aware, that this assertion is dissonant to the prevailing belief of many persons at the present time. It has become fashionable to speak of it as a matter of little consequence, what our religious sentiments are, or whether we have any or none. The spirit of free enquiry, and right of private judgment, it is to be hoped, will ever be maintained in this country, among the inviolable and sacred blessings which belong to man. If such a wish, however, beguile us into the supposition, that the great Author of truth, after giving us a Revelation, is quite indifferent in regard to our opinions respecting it, we certainly offer him a great affront, and turn our liberty into dangerous licentiousness.

Should it be here enquired, how far, as Christians, we must really agree, and in what particular points of doctrine it may be safe to differ; it is readily acknowledged, that no explicit answer can be given to such a question. In ascertaining what belongs to the Christian character, there are a variety of circumstances to be considered, far above the reach of any human skill, and fitly to be judged of by God alone. That a great diversity of religious sentiments may happen in the Christian world, in perfect agreement with a state of real virtue in the minds of their various abettors, is evinced by what often occurs among
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men, who are remarkably eminent for their piety, genius, and close application to the study of divine truth. Undoubtedly we have remarked, that there are thousands of other persons, who, through various means, may be said to be strictly *passive* in the adoption of their opinions; and owing to the imbecility, and not the badness of their minds, are more properly to be compared to certain curious machines designed to be acted on, than to the agents who are employed to put them into motion. True candour therefore, will always incline us to make great allowances for our disagreements in religious doctrines. It is not supposed, by any thing which has been advanced, that absolute demerit is in all cases associated with the errors of our creed. The single point professedly maintained, is the responsibility to which we are subject before the Almighty, for our sentiments in religion, whatever they may be;—a point which cannot readily be denied, whilst we believe in revelation; for if, according to its express language, we are to give an account for all the thoughts and words which relate to our common dealings in human life, and our intercourse with men, surely it is as consonant to sacred truth and reason, that we should render the same account for those thoughts or sentiments, which have relation to the more important article of our religion, or, as it may be termed, our intercourse with God.

And let it be remarked, that this responsibility becomes more truly important, when the doctrines on which we pass opinion, are clearly among the essentials in religion. As these are few, it may be thought perhaps, that with those who believe in Christianity, there is but little danger that they will ever be denied. In a direct and professed manner, they are indeed less frequently brought into dispute than any others. May it

not, however, be made a very serious question, whether by the constructions sometimes annexed, or the articles either maintained or denied to belong to them, they are not often as virtually given up, as by a positive and entire renunciation? The human mind, often dazzled by the false colourings of deception, is subject perhaps to no greater evil than that of deceiving itself. Every palpable denial of truth is at once perceived to be dangerous. Where a genuine doctrine is disrelished, the abilities of men are fully equal to the invention of sophistical arguments to depreciate or counteract it, which bearing in some particulars the semblance of truth, operate like magic influence on the minds of the inventors, producing a kind of conviction, that they are in fact engaged in supporting and raising it to honour. How often has the work of mediation by Jesus Christ been so treated of, by false reasoning, as in effect to stamp on our Saviour the character of a minister of sin;—the article of justification by faith, been explained in such a method, as by implication to countenance a real laxness in morals;—and the Gospel itself considered as containing what may emphatically be called the doctrines of grace, been denied this its distinguishing glory, when, whatever might appear to be the case *consequentially*, it would be difficult to affix on the abettors of these explanations, the *direct* renunciation of any one of its fundamental truths?—Making, therefore, all the proper allowances which charity suggests, I imagine it must be granted without reserve, *that the corruption of the human heart has a vast influence in the production of all false creeds on the subject of religion.* The fact is, that in whatever instances the opinions of men are the result or offspring of their affections, they may so far be said to form a part of their moral characters;—occupying, in this respect, the same place with their

their actions, which however indifferent, if considered abstractedly from the motives, yet as in almost all cases they naturally result from them, are therefore, without any scruple, acknowledged to be the proper objects of praise or blame.

Nor let it be thought that these ideas concerning the future responsibility of mankind for the articles of their creed, apply not with equal force to those who even boast in having no established sentiments of any kind. In former centuries, the contention in the Christian world was for points of orthodoxy. One extreme is often followed by another. At present, the prevailing excess seems to be for candour and liberality. There is a spirit of candour, which is in pure conformity with the Gospel: It is the product of refined, of humble, and of virtuous love. There is a false species of it, professing equal regard for the different systems of religious opinions, but generated in the want of proper regard for any. It is the candour of the vacant and unstable mind, afraid explicitly to renounce the truth, but too indolent to examine it, uniting complacency in the Deist, as well as in the believer in the Christian system, and to be accounted for hereafter on the same principles with infidelity itself.

This leads me seriously to ask, whether there is any plea on which the professed Deist can rest a comfortable hope of judicial acceptance or excuse before his Judge, on supposition he is in an error? If the Scriptures be of divine original, it is to be inferred, that they contain all those evidences of their authenticity, which, though they were not intended to enforce belief, yet, in the circumstances of mankind, are sufficient to produce it in the enquiring and uncorrupted mind. Whatever apologies, therefore, may be offered for the fallibility of the human judgment, certainly it must be a very solemn process, when, at the appearance of the Judge, enquiry is made concerning

concerning the faith, as well as the conduct of men, and the infidel must stand confessed as one, who, by renouncing the Gospel, has impeached the wisdom of the Saviour, in not giving sufficient proof, as the allegation implies, of his mission from the Father—denied his goodness in undertaking the office of a Redeemer, and disowned the grace, which, to the astonishment of the assembled universe, will now be known to be the power of God, to the everlasting salvation of his saints.

The *second* remark which I shall make, in consequence of its relation to the subject of discourse, is this, that whatever value is to be put on a good creed, or system of religious affections, the preference, without controversy, is ever to be given to the pious regulation of the heart.

The regulation of the heart is of the first importance, because it frequently goes before our sentiments, and greatly governs in their final choice. It is of the first importance, because, if our sentiments were wholly true, they would do nothing to recommend us to the favour of the Almighty, on the Gospel-plan, without the addition of this most excellent ingredient. A great measure of purity in doctrine may arise from adventitious circumstances: Possibly it may be the mere effect of education: But purity of mind must be the effect of an higher cause, even the love of God, experienced in its spirituality and power. It is easy for any person to avow and talk highly of orthodoxy, when the motives may be altogether unworthy the Christian and the man. It is not so easy to express the internal graces of religion, and in life as well as conversation, to recommend the Gospel, by the lovely and energetic exhibition of its charms.

Should we apply these sentiments to a great part of the history of mankind, especially in former ages of the world, what indubitable, and alas! in many cases, what melancholy evidence should we receive of their truth! Of all
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the evils which have disturbed the peace and happiness of society, none have been more pregnant than the influence of professed orthodoxy, destitute of true religion. To this has been owing the rise of dungeons and racks, and gradual fires for heretics; in one word, of the inquisition itself, that engine of cruelty in the extreme, with horror plumed on its head. We shall never, it may be, have imputed to us the perpetration of the same actions; but it will be well to remember that, at least in some degree, the same unhallowed passions may, at an unguarded time, find admission into our breasts, though we are ready now so heartily to condemn them. In the study of human nature, have we not often observed, that there is the pride of opinion, as well as of rank or fortune, which, like other species of this vice, in many circumstances, produces distance between man and man, engendering mental, though it may not arise to open or declared strife.

Unhappy is it, when this pride is connected with the subject of religion. He who, Pharisee like, is puffed up, from the apprehensions of his orthodoxy, is exposed to the most imminent danger. Indulging the passion under the pretext of a virtue, the means of detection are consequently taken away. The fascination becomes powerful, through the effect of indulgence; and the secret hints of reason are overborne by the more agreeable suggestions arising from vanity and self-applause. With the wise and religious man no employment, therefore, will be judged of more importance, than that of a careful inspection into the state and temper of his mind. He will wish ardently to improve in the knowledge of truth; but he will wish more to improve in holiness and conformity to the will of Heaven. He will be desirous, at proper times, and in a proper manner, even to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints; but he will consider it a
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more glorious contest; the object of which is the enlargement of *the virtues of the heart*; more glorious, because more opposed to the corrupt passions of human nature; improving the mind to better purpose, in sentiments of humility; increasing its capacity for discernment, and exalting it to God. Engaged in such a combat, he will enjoy a world of pleasures, undiscoverable by the self-righteous and the proud; will more easily learn what are the pure affections, as well as practical duties, which he owes his fellow-men and fellow-Christians; and, in fine, will know of the doctrine of Christ, which, coming from God, will appear every way to be worthy of him, and truly divine.

As an *improvement* of the past discourse, let us reflect on the importance of examining the Scriptures, with seriousness and impartiality.

It is not only observable, that true seriousness, in conjunction with piety, is an assistant in acquiring the knowledge of moral truth, but by reciprocal influence, the knowledge of moral truth is in like manner an auxiliary in the progression of real piety. Crediting the New Testament, the time *was*, when the Son of God appeared in a humble form on earth, as a teacher of the truth, and was despised and rejected of men, for no other reason than that he declared it. This was occasioned by their want of piety. The time *will be*, when the same Personage will appear again, but in a very different manner, and the evidences in favour of his doctrines will be so highly exalted, as that whether we are deficient in piety or not, we shall be utterly unable to withstand them.

If, like the Jews, we have discredited his instructions, passed contempt upon his cross, and refused his love, with what justice may that energetic language apply, which he once delivered on earth for our admonition, *Whosoever therefore*

therefore shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels?—But if we have studied his Gospel, understood its doctrines, and relished its truths, the second advent of our Saviour will be the grand æra to introduce us unto glory. We shall then be instructed to more advantage than our present humble situation can possibly admit; the doctrines we have here begun to admire, will unfold themselves to our intellectual capacities, in their highest energy and beauty; our rapture will be in proportion to our augmented knowledge, and our piety receive additional strength from our perception of refined truth. Oh! glorious and resplendent day, which will introduce us as the citizens of Heaven—advance us to the company of angels—of them to be informed of the perfections of their Divine Author—with them to converse on the nature of his works and word, and, in their mode, unite in the celebration of his love!

Then shall we find, that our present reverence for truth and desire of improvement, will be gratified above our most sanguine hopes. Admitted into the celestial paradise, we shall no longer be absent from the Saviour; but approaching his throne, or walking with him by the side of living fountains of water, shall be taught the sublime doctrines of Christian philosophy from his own lips, whilst wrapt in admiration at his words, we shall, at solemn seasons, unite with thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand of like happy beings, saying, *Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb, for ever and ever. Amen.*

SERMON XVI.

THE INFLUENCE OF APPLAUSE.

BY

JOHN DEVOTION, A. M.

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PROV. XXVII. 21.

As the firing pot for silver, and the furnace for gold, so is a man to his praise.

THE various passions implanted in human nature are necessary to animate the soul in the service of God and our generation. In a state of innocency, there was no danger of undue direction, or inordinate use. Since the entrance of sin, true religion claims the office of regulating the passions, by exhibiting suitable objects for their exercise, and wholesome rules for restraint. The poet sung 'love of fame the universal passion.' The wisest of mere men beheld this principle in human nature; he saw the effect of praise upon mankind.

Our text is a rule, grounded upon the observable effect of it upon man; a refined rule for trial of our true moral character,

character, or religious state; drawn in grandeur of style, and eastern dress. A rule, when understood, as profitable for the lowest Christian, as for the monarch on the throne.

The text may be literally rendered, a *fining pot* for silver, and a *furnace* for gold, and a *man to the mouth* of his praise. The moral instruction here designed, may thus be expressed—The conduct of men, in regard of their praise, may be as sure trial of their moral and religious character, as the *fining pot* is of silver, and the *furnace* of gold. Since this is evidently designed for religious instruction, in a virtuous and holy life, or reproof to the ungodly, it becomes necessary to determine with precision what the writer intended by a man's praise, and what will be the conduct of persons of different moral characters upon the bestowment of their praise. The reason also, why praise has this different effect on persons of different moral characters—Whence the certainty of this rule will appear.

By praise understand, not the plaudits of individuals, or of the multitude, for actions which they, and all who hear, judge highly unworthy of commendation, spoken in the tone of sarcastic irony. This may have a different effect upon persons, as they have different conceptions. Some are confounded by it; others held in suspense whether it were designed for raillery, or applause. Others may be filled with resentment, thinking the mantle of charity much more divine than such *words of jaunterie*.

Neither by praise are we to understand, that given by mistake, as when another's conduct is ignorantly, yet innocently ascribed to us, with the praise of his commendable behaviour. Persons conscious such praise belongs not to them, are not tried by it. The text saith not, *ye is a man to another's praise*.

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By a man's praise, we are to understand real unfeigned praise, bestowed for actions or conduct commendable in the sight of men, useful to community. Many actions are materially good, which, however, proceed not from an heart right with God.

Were no other than such ever made the subject-matter of praise, there had been no ground for this refined rule of trial—no praise of men, without the concurrent praise of God; unless by mere mistake, which comes not within the meaning of this rule. Praise may be given by men for actions which may not receive, *Well done good and faithful servant*, from the Righteous Judge. *The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.* Praise for actions, which have a beneficent aspect on community, answers valuable purposes; but if a man's praise, for such actions only as are virtuous, serve as *the fining pot for silver, and the furnace for gold*, fondness of the praise of men, would be one of the best evidences of a right to enter in through the gates into the city; which yet is so far from being an evidence of a right to the tree of life, that it becomes, in some instances, an effectual hindrance to faith in Jesus Christ. *How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?* All of us, then, whether godly or ungodly, may have our praise, which, ascribed to us, will have the same effect as the fining pot has on metals which have the appearance of silver, and the furnace on those which have the appearance of gold. Therefore, to observe how a man is to his praise, is a matter of serious importance to every soul of man.

Let us, therefore, consider the conduct of persons of different moral characters, when their praise is given them. Behold a person of real unfeigned piety, under the

the bestowment of his praise due from men. His praise refines him, as the fining pot does silver; renders him thankful to God for a good name among men. Gratitude first lifts up his soul to God; for *a good name is better than precious ointment*. He receives it as a talent bestowed, whereby he is enabled to do more service for God, and become more extensively useful to mankind. He is animated in his labours, he becomes more zealous in the cause of truth, that his talent be not wrapped in a napkin. He becomes studious to behave wisely in the fear of God, that he may be the subject of that blessed sentence, *Well done good and faithful servant*. Praise to a righteous soul will render it seriously inquisitive, whether its conduct really deserves praise—the praise not of men only, but of God also. Such will improve the praise of men bestowed on them, to render them more emulous of that praise infinitely more precious. *He is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God*. Praise bestowed on the righteous produces humility. Sensible that great imperfections attend their best services, even such as men may applaud; they yet remember, *when they have done all, they are but unprofitable servants*. Such fear, lest the praise of men should move them from their guard, make them vain in the sight of God, and render them undeserving his favour. Praise therefore renders them more watchful against every thing which might give just offence to God or man. Their desire and prayer to God is, that their *path may shine more and more unto the perfect day*.

Praise renders the righteous respectful toward those who bestow it. True gratitude is found in God's children, if any where among men. Gracious souls rejoice to requite a kind disposition toward them. In an evil world,

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where there is much strife of tongues, where many delight more in reviling than blessing, it discovers a kind disposition to reward virtuous actions with their just praise.

The righteous view this, as a demand upon their gratitude. The righteous, when modestly commended for good, merciful, and beneficent actions, become more diligent to improve in well-doing, that they may answer the expectation of their friends, the honourable of the earth, but especially of God, who requires us to be perfect, as he is perfect. It is a part of Christian attainment to approve ourselves by good report, as well as evil report—to acquire the mastery of ourselves, so as to be able to pass through good report, without being vainly puffed up thereby. It is the wholesome instruction of an inspired Apostle, to *every man among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.* Thus praise serves to refine the righteous in Christian virtues, and makes him shine as gold purified in the furnace. He is led to faithful examination of his own conduct, that he may reject all which would be found to be *wood, hay and stubble.* He is solicitous to cast out every thing, which, upon trial, is found to be but mere dross. His praise, through grace, eventually purges out much, which would otherwise have been burnt at the last day. Praise to a righteous man is a fiery trial, where he needs humility and sober thoughts. It is a furnace, in which every grace will be needed to support a shining character. There is great danger lest vanity be kindled; for remainders of corruption await the children of God in this imperfect state. Humility, prayer, sober thinking, and watchfulness, will help him to endure the trial. As
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the furnace for gold, so is a man to the mouth of his praise.

Not so is it with the ungodly. Praise bestowed on him renders him vain, self-confident, and self-conceited. His praise puffs him up with pride. He becomes haughty and insolent toward all who neglect to offer the incense of his praise. He views himself exalted upon the pinnacle of honour, above the attainments of any of his equals, worthy to receive honour and applause from all around him. Instead of continuing patiently in the way of well-doing, seeking glory, honour, and immortality, he is impatient, when any neglect to sound the trumpet of his praise. His heart, bound up in self-applause, in the honour that cometh from man, becomes insensible to the honour that cometh from God only. Self-applause is the idol of his soul; and he esteems every one greatly wanting in duty, who refuses to bow the knee, or who withholds this grateful incense. He esteems one commendable action fully sufficient to cover a multitude of sins. He thinks not of continuing patiently in the way of well-doing; or should a few other instances be found, where praise may be given him, this is all his salvation, and all his desire. Jealous of his honour, he is impatient to hear another praised, lest his glory should be eclipsed thereby. Should his praise be sounded on as high a key as Herod's was, *It is the voice of God, and not of a man*; neither would he be concerned to give God the glory. The language of his heart, when contemplating his praise, is in the very spirit of that proud monarch, *Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?* Destitute of humility, and void of thankfulness to the God of all his mercies, praise tries him, proves him, and destroys him.

Persons of this character become careless—regardless of the praise of God. The praise of men is the grand prize of their ambitious pursuit. This is their idol. To this they bow the knee. Here they rest. *This is their chief good.* They have obtained their highest wish. Their dependence henceforward is, upon the applause already received, to gain them influence with the multitude. Negligence, sloth and carelessness come upon them. A supposed superiority over others, and envy toward such as share a larger portion, render them haughty and insolent. Their conduct, at the mouth of praise, shews them light as chaff, and viler than dross; *reprobate silver shall men call them.* Praising them consumes the little appearance of something commendable. Praising persons for such conduct as is praiseworthy, is an effectual way to discover the principle whereby they are influenced. By attention to the operation of our own minds at the mouth of praise, we may as certainly discover whether we are gold or silver, or but mere dross, as the furnace and fining pot will determine the character and value of metals. That striving to excel, though upon a low principle, that seeking the praise of men, for actions commendable among men, is turned into glorying in what they have already attained. Not having any intrinsic value in them, praise consumes them, even as the furnace burns up the dross, they are devoured as stubble fully dry. Light as chaff, they are driven away by the breath of applause.

The reason of the different effect of praise upon persons of these different characters, becomes manifest, from their different state in the inner man of the heart, and their different qualities. The reason of the different effect of the fining pot and furnace upon metals, is the different nature and quality of metals cast into them. Silver and gold are fine and pure. There is nothing for the fire to consume.

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Grosser metals are constituted of grosser matter than fire. Fire, therefore, calcines them; some, still more gross, are burnt up. The reason why the furnace of praise has a different effect upon persons of different characters, is their different nature and quality. The righteous is the Jew inwardly, *whose circumcision is of the heart, in the spirit*. His heart has been circumcised with the true circumcision; born of God; renewed by the Spirit; a principle of holiness is formed, which is pure. Gross corruptions are cut off—vain-glorying cast out—no object is suffered to engross his affections but God and the Redeemer. God's glory is his aim, and to become meet to enjoy him, his principal concern. He rests not in circumcision which is in the letter, a bare seal of the covenant, not in a bare profession. The furnace of affliction or of praise may refine, but cannot destroy holiness. His praise is of God. The heart of the ungodly man is not circumcised; it is the cage of every unclean bird. Self-love reigns there, and blinds the mind. The understanding is darkened. And though light is come into the world, he loves darkness rather than light, because his deeds are evil. He rests in that circumcision which is in the letter, in a bare seal of the covenant, or visible relation to God, without the true circumcision of the heart in the spirit of his mind. His praise is of men. This is the idol of his heart. The Jew inwardly, whose circumcision is of the heart, in the spirit, looks at the praise of God, and acceptance in the Beloved, as the mark, the prize of his high calling, in Christ Jesus. The praise of men is the distinguishing characteristic of one, whose circumcision is not of the heart, in the spirit, but in the letter. The praise of men gratifies his uncircumcised heart. By denying him this, you take away his god, and what has he more? The circumcised in heart and spirit, and the uncircumcised in

heart and spirit, have different natures and qualities. The one has a renewed nature—renewed in knowledge, after the image of him that created him. The other has an unrenewed and unholy nature. The distinguishing characteristic mark of the one is, *whose praise is not of men, but of God*. Of the other, *whose praise is of men*. Praise, therefore, has this different effect upon them, according to their different nature and qualities: Whence this rule becomes as certain, as that different natures and qualities are not the same; or that different effects will flow from different causes.

The natural improvement of this subject is, to determine our moral and religious character by the effect which the praise of men has upon us. If we are refined, if made more humble, vigilant, active and sober, yet ardent in our pursuit after an eternal weight of glory, 'we have the true circumcision, whose praise is not of men but of God. The furnace of praise will render us more fit for our Master's service.

But if the praise of men renders us vain, haughty, insolent, slothful and envious, *reprobate silver shall men call them*. Such may see the necessity of *circumcision, that is of the heart, and in the spirit*—the necessity of being born again—of being renewed in the spirit of their minds—of having the vanity of their minds subdued by grace. Let such consider how miserable they must be after death, who have no better inheritance than the breath of human praise when on earth. How will such wish, in vain, when too late, for that praise ~~of~~ God, *Well done good and faithful servant*. Such, therefore, the true circumcision of the heart, in the spirit, whose praise will then be of God. Hence also see, that the furnace of praise is a fiery trial to the righteous, as well as the unrighteous. The remainders of vanity, even in godly men, are in danger
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of being set on fire in the furnace of praise. Humble minds, sensible of the danger, see the need of vigilance, prayer, and sober thinking of themselves. They, therefore, rejoice in good report, with humility and trembling. Happy they who improve the praise of men, to press them on to secure the praise of God.

The furnace of praise is a more fiery trial to the ungodly. Their vanity is set on fire. They appear vile as the dross; yet, like distempered patients, hanker after that which destroys them. The religion of the Gospel presents a suitable object for the gratification of this universal passion. *Well done good and faithful servant.* The applause of the omniscient, heart-searching God, will fill the soul with joy unspeakable, and full of glory; but faithful service, flowing from circumcision of the heart, in the spirit, must evidence the heart right with God. That *well done* will never be pronounced by the Judge, but only where there has been a patient continuance in well-doing. Let the subject be improved to engage every soul of man to seek the honour that cometh from God only—to compare actions by the unerring rule—to watch in simplicity and godly sincerity, that the testimony of conscience may be matter of rejoicing. Let every one study to approve himself by good report and evil report. If called to suffer wrongfully, endure with patience. Praise from the mouth of the Judge will fully compensate all sufferings in this life. With this will commence that crown of glory that fadeth not away.

S E R M O N XVII.

MORAL REFLECTIONS UPON THE SEASON OF HARVEST.

BY

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JOHN iv. 35, 36, 37, 38.

Say not ye, there are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? Behold, I say unto you, lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, for they are white already to harvest; and he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal; that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together; and herein is that saying true, one soweth and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour; other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours.

IT was the great and excellent character of the Lord Jesus Christ, that he went about doing good. Into whatever place or company he came, in the house and by the way, at the table and in his walks, among friends and enemies,

enemies, he embraced every opportunity of glorifying God and benefiting mankind. To promote these important and benevolent ends, the method which he took was the wisest and best adapted to attract attention, and impress the mind, that can be imagined.

He collected images, and drew a lesson of instruction from all the productions of nature, and all the objects around him. The luminaries of heaven, the birds of the air, the beasts of the field, and the fishes of the sea: The vicissitudes of the seasons, with their productions—the lilies arrayed in their beautiful attire; the trees putting forth their leaves; the vine bearing fruit; the barren fig-tree; the living fountain and refreshing stream; the ploughing of the ground; the sowing of the seed; the springing up and growing of the grain with the tares; the whitening harvest; the joy at ingathering; the separation of the wheat from the chaff; the laying up the one in the granary of the husbandman, and the burning the other with fire, as was the custom in eastern countries.—These, together with the different occupations, common occurrences, and remarkable transactions of human life, proverbial sayings, Jewish types and ceremonies, were all laid hold on and improved as occasion offered, or they presented to his view and observation, to convey some useful instruction in doctrine and morals, to his disciples and followers.

The truth of these observations, the whole history of our Lord's life and method of teaching fully evinces, and a most beautiful illustration of several of them, is contained in our text and context.

In the beginning of this chapter, we read, that passing from Judea to Galilee, through Samaria, and being wearied with his journey, Jesus sat himself down to rest by Jacob's well, near the city Sychar, while his disciples went
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into the city to purchase provision for his and their own refreshment. While he sat thus at the well, waiting their return, there came a Samaritan woman out of the city to draw water—of her, asking a drink, and receiving an answer, which imported a denial because he was a Jew, between whose nation and her own there was the most inveterate hatred; he took occasion, from the water which she had drawn from this well, to discourse to her, and make her a free offer of the water of eternal life; or as the figure is elsewhere explained, under the emblem of water, to describe to her the nature, and invite her to partake of the influences of the Holy Spirit, which, like water to a man parched with thirst, cools the heat and fervency of earthly desires, refreshes the heart with divine joy and comfort in the present state, and will be the source of complete never-ending felicity in heaven; where none of the continually returning wants, which here create so much trouble and uneasiness, will ever be felt or known.—*Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith unto thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water. Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again; but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water, springing up to everlasting life.* After these remarks upon the nature and effects of that water of life which Jesus had to give, and now offered to this woman of Samaria, he embraced the opportunity which her interrogatories in the sequel of their discourse gave him, first to explain to her the nature of God, and the worship which is to be paid to him; and then, upon her expressing her belief and expectation of the coming of the Messiah, to declare unto her that he himself was
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the very person. *I know, said she, that Messias cometh, which is called Christ; when he hath come he will tell us all things.* Jesus saith unto her, *I that speak unto thee am he.* Of which being now fully convinced, from the extraordinary knowledge which he discovered of her own circumstances and conduct, and feeling something of that benevolent spirit which the Gospel ever breathes and imparts to those who submit to its influence, she is anxious that her friends and acquaintance should partake of the same good news. In the joy of her heart, therefore, she hastes away to them saying, *Come see a man who hath told me all things I ever did, is not this the Christ?* Soon after her departure from Jesus, the disciples returned to him from the city with the provisions they had purchased, and prayed him, saying, *Master, eat:* To which invitation, alluding to the discourse in which he had been employed, and the success of his instructions to the Samaritan woman in their absence, he answered, *I have meat to eat that ye know not of; my meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and finish his work.* At this moment, while in the midst of his discourse with his disciples, upon a subject which by reason of their absence they did not so well understand, the Samaritan woman, with numbers of others to whom she had carried the joyful news of the Messiah, appeared in sight, with speed hastening to see the man of whom she had told such wonderful things. Upon this, as is probable, Jesus stretching out his hand and pointing towards them, addressed his disciples in the figurative but striking and beautiful language of the text.

Say not ye, there are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? Behold, I say unto you, lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, for they are white already to harvest; and he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto eternal life, that both he that soweth and he that reapeth

may rejoice together : and herein is that saying true, one soweth and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that on which ye bestowed no labour ; other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours. Some suppose that the phrase, say ye not there are yet four months and then cometh harvest, was a proverbial expression used for the encouragement of husbandmen at the time of sowing, and that the meaning of our Lord, in his allusion to it on this occasion, is as if he had said, " In your common harvest you usually say, after your seed is sown, four months hence will be the harvest or the time when you shall reap the seed sown ; but in this spiritual harvest it is otherwise, for the seed sown in the heart of the woman of Samaria, but an hour or two ago, hath made those Samaritans whom ye see coming yonder with such eager haste, already ripe for the harvest or gathering into my kingdom." But though this interpretation makes a very profitable sense, yet as no ancient author gives any account of such proverb prevalent among the Jews, and as the time between sowing and harvest is different with different kinds of grain, I rather choose to take the words in their literal signification, supposing them to mean, that at the time our Lord delivered this discourse, it was actually four months from their common harvest ; and as Jacob's well was without the city Sychar, according to Mr Maundrell, near one third of an hour's travel distant ; it might be surrounded with sown fields, whose then state, compared with the distance from harvest, might very naturally, according to our Lord's usual method of improving the objects around him, give rise to the figurative language of the text, which applied to the Samaritans, who, struck with the report of the woman, were coming to enquire into, and see for themselves the truth of the thing she had told them, means, that though it was then indeed four months before

before their earthly harvest would come on, yet the spiritual harvest in these Samaritans, was in a sense now fully ripe, and numbers ready to be gathered into the Christian church. In this view the whole passage is thus, or to this effect, excellently paraphrased by Dr Doddridge. Do not you say there are *yet four months and then cometh harvest*, that is, "Is it not now four months before you expect to reap the harvest of your fields? But behold, I say unto you, lift up your eyes and survey the multitude coming yonder—who are already laden with a plentiful crop, and appear like a field of grain white to the harvest,—and it is your happiness to be employed in the blessed work of gathering in this harvest—for he that faithfully reaps the harvest of which I now speak, receiveth far more valuable wages than man can give, and has the great additional satisfaction of thinking he gathers in the fruit unto eternal life, in the salvation of himself and those that hear him; so that on this account, both he that sows and he that reaps may rejoice together; and those souls, to whose salvation they have in different ways contributed, will be both a crown of honour, and objects of everlasting complacency and delight. And in this sense may it be justly said, herein is that proverbial saying true, one soweth and another reapeth; for after he has sown his field, it often happens that a man dies or removes before he gathereth in the harvest, and so leaves it to another, who enjoys the advantage of his pains; and thus I have sent you to reap the fruit of that on which ye have not laboured, either to till or sow the ground. The prophets, and other holy men of former ages, having toiled, as it were, to cultivate the field, and thereby made your work much easier than otherwise it would have been; so that my preaching this day in your absence, is an emblem of what God has wisely ordered in the course

of his providence. Others have laboured, and you have entered into the field on which their labours have been carefully employed. Let this then engage your diligence, with a becoming spirit and ready cheerfulness to apply to your work, and great shall be your reward." From the words thus introduced, the four following observations naturally arise.

I. That the ready attention of multitudes to hear and obey the Gospel, is fitly compared to harvest.

II. That when such a season comes, or such a disposition appears, it is the duty, and will be the pleasure and delight of every true friend of souls, and especially of every faithful minister of the Gospel, to be remarkably engaged in reaping and gathering in this harvest.

III. That even though the seed sown does not appear to spring up and grow to a fruitful harvest in our day, yet it may in another's who may succeed, or, as the text expresses it, afterwards enter into our labours, and therefore we should not be discouraged, but persevere in the same laudable work of sowing the seed, however little fruit may at present appear to spring from it, not knowing when or how it will prosper. And because,

IV. Whether we are successful, and have the satisfaction of seeing the fruit of our labours in our own day or not, if we are faithful, we shall nevertheless receive wages, and rejoice with them who are so favoured as to reap from what we or others have sowed.

To each of the above observations, I shall say a few things in their order. And as to the

I. That

I. That the ready attention of multitudes to hear and obey the Gospel is fitly compared to harvest, will appear from the consideration of the following particulars, wherein there is a resemblance.

1. That as harvest is the time when grain is ripe and fit for ingathering and use, so a ready and willing mind to hear and obey the Gospel, is that which renders men fit for ingathering into the church and kingdom of Christ. While they are careless and inattentive, there is little prospect of any good being done them, or any fruit from the preaching of the word unto them; it falls like seed by the way side, which the fowls of the air, every vain thought and temptation, catches away and devours; or like seed on a rock, where it makes no impression, nor can take root, and so perishes for want of a proper soil or foundation for it to grow in; but when the minds of men are roused to hear and attend, when their hearts are pricked with a sense of their sins, and opened to receive the word,—then, like a flourishing field of ripening grain, there is a prospect of a plentiful harvest—that numbers of souls will be gathered in from the field of the world, where Satan reigns in the hearts of the children of disobedience, to the church and kingdom of Christ, as sheaves bound up in the bundle of eternal life.

2. Harvest implies an actual ingathering of the fruit and grain from the field into the barns and granaries of the husbandman for use; so, when great and general attention to the word of God prevails among a people, then commonly numbers are gathered in from the world into the church, who will be finally stored, if I may so express it, in the garner of that heavenly Husbandman, whose husbandry they are, and in whose house, we are told, there are many mansions prepared, sufficient room to receive them all. Some, indeed, who at such a time
put

put out fair, and appear green and flourishing for a while, yet like fields whose grain is blasted, and trees whose fruit drops off before it comes to maturity, they soon fall away, and all the blooming prospects of future fruitfulness, which they gave, suddenly vanish. *The cares of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the love of pleasure*, choke and stop their growth, or the scorching fire of persecution withers their verdure that they die.

But though this is the case with some, and alas! with too many who appear to spring up fair, and bloom and grow well for a time; yet, blessed be God, there are others, who like grain and fruit matured by the gentle moisture of the dew, the enriching showers of falling rain, and the genial influence of the enlivening sun, continue to grow till they are ripe for the harvest—till they are actually gathered into the visible church, and planted in the garden and vineyard of God on earth, from whence they shall be gathered and translated to his kingdom and glory above.

And when there are great numbers, who thus attend to the word, gladly receive it, submit unto it, and grow thereby to maturity,—this most properly answers to the idea of harvest.—This seems to be the sense in which the phrase is used in the text, in allusion, not only to the readiness with which numbers of the Samaritans came to Christ on this occasion, but to the vastly superior numbers which were afterwards to be converted to the faith of the Gospel, by the preaching of the Apostles and others, to what there ever were before, by all the labours of the Patriarchs and Prophets. These holy men, comparatively speaking, did but sow the seed and prepare the way for that abundant harvest which the Apostles and others have since reaped. When we read of three thousand converted in one day, by the preaching of Peter;

Peter; of five thousand at another, by Peter and John, and of the sudden and extensive spread of the Gospel, and the numerous churches gathered not only throughout Judea, but throughout the whole Roman empire, which then extended to almost every part of the known world, truly we may say, this was harvest indeed!

3. The time of harvest is a time of joy. Hence in the sacred Scripture, any great joy is compared to the joy of harvest. The prophet Isaiah, speaking of the birth of Christ, the happy change wrought thereby, and the great joy that should, or ought to spring up in the hearts of men thereupon, saith, They joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. God's ancient people, the Jews, by Divine appointment, observed a feast, which they called the feast of harvest, when, as an expression of their gratitude, they offered up the first fruits of their fields to God, and, with joyful hearts, participated in the plenty with which he had increased their store; and in some parts of our own country, it is usual at the conclusion of wheat harvest, to express their joy by some extraordinary good cheer. In all parts of the world, a fruitful or plentiful harvest is considered as a just subject of joy.

So when the word has due course, and numbers are gathered in by it, it is a matter of great joy both to them who sow the seed or preach the word; and to them who receive it, or are gathered in by it. They who receive and are gathered in by the word, rejoice in the happy change which is made in their present circumstances and future prospects.—Their enjoyments are now so much more excellent and noble;—their views and hopes of future good, so elevating and transporting, that they sometimes know not how to repress or contain their joy. They are ready to say with the Psalmist, *Come all*

ye that love the Lord, and I will tell you what he hath done for my soul: and with the woman when she had found her piece of silver, *Come rejoice with me.* They, indeed, rejoice before God according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil; with a joy, as Peter expresses it, *unspeakable and full of glory.* They who sow the seed or preach the word, rejoice in being made the honoured instruments of so much good to them. Thus they that sow, and they that reap, may be said to *rejoice together*, even in this world, and much more will they do so in the world to come. And if a rich harvest, or plentiful ingathering of grain from the field, for the support of our perishing bodies, is just matter of joy and thankfulness, much more is the ready reception of the word of God, and hearty subjection of souls to Jesus Christ, who is the bread of life, the food that nourisheth and supporteth the immortal life of the soul.—This is matter of joy, not only to all the good and benevolent on earth, but to the angels of God in heaven; for we are told, *there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth*, and much more may we suppose over numbers who repent. In view of this and its happy consequents, they are represented at the birth of our Saviour, who is exalted to give repentance and remission of sins, in joyful anthems, proclaiming *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to man.*

II. This brings me to the *second* observation, viz. That when such a season comes, or such a ready disposition is manifested to hear the word, then it is the duty, and will be the pleasure and delight of every true friend of souls, and especially of every faithful minister of Christ, to be doubly engaged in forwarding the work, and assisting in gathering in this spiritual harvest. If what Solomon says of him who sleepeth when the harvest of the field is gathering,

thering, is true, that he is a *son that causeth shame*, much more is he who sleepeth, is indolent and inactive, or useth only a common diligence in this harvest of souls. For as the harvest of the field has its particular season, and when it comes, every hand is required to gather and get it in, so there are some seasons which seem to be peculiarly favourable to the ingathering of this spiritual harvest. Particularly when the mind is impressed,—the attention roused, and the heart deeply affected,—when the word falls with weight,—when conscience smites the sinner, and the general cry is, *What shall we do to be saved?* Then may we say in the words of the Divine Husbandman, *Lift up your eyes and behold! the fields are white for the harvest.* Souls are then ready and ripe for the spiritual reaper's hand, and then, to keep up the metaphor, all hands should be engaged, and every nerve exerted to gather in the loaded sheaves, and bring home the precious harvest. This Christ and his Apostles have commanded and urged by the most powerful motives, and their own most shining examples in this great work. *My meat*, said Christ, *is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.* This is my chief delight: I have greater pleasure in it, than in any sensual enjoyment; more satisfaction than even my necessary food can afford, when received to allay the extremities of hunger. Very eminently was this temper displayed on this occasion, when, though our Lord was wearied and spent by the fatigues of his journey, he was yet so intent upon his Father's business, the great work upon which he was sent, to save ruined souls, that he postponed his immediate and needed refreshment, from the provision which his disciples had brought from the neighbouring town, till he had conversed with, and instructed the Samaritans in the nature of his own character and kingdom. Thus the Apostle discovered an extraor-

dinary pleasure and diligence, according to the more extraordinary calls of Providence, and the greater readiness to hear and attend their instructions, which appeared in those among whom they laboured. And thus it is more or less with every faithful minister and true disciple of Jesus Christ. Not only a sense of duty urges, but sincere joy and pleasure give new spring to their exertions, and animate them with double diligence in all their work. When the benevolent minister of Jesus beholds a multitude of precious immortals, all attentive to the important message he has to deliver, hanging upon his lips, greedily catching at, and drinking in the sincere milk of the word as it flows from his mouth, by a sort of sympathy and virtuous contagion, if I may so express it, his heart is melted, yea, his whole soul is moved and attracted, and, as though touched with a live coal from off the divine altar, his tongue is loosed, and then, if ever, he will preach and pray with the Spirit of his Divine and compassionate Master. That deadness, languor, and indifference, which before sealed his lips, or, as it were, chilled his words as they fell from his mouth, will now be removed, and holy ardent love to God and the souls of men, will warm his heart, give volubility to his tongue, and energy to his discourse:—It will fall with almost irresistible force, and like the electrical fire, communicate and spread the Divine flame with which it is filled, to every heart and soul of the audience. O then it is easy preaching! it is easy praying! *The fire is in the midst of the wheels, and like the chariots of Amminadib,* the thoughts and affections run sweetly and swiftly in the work of the Lord. But, alas! this is a happiness that the best and most faithful of Christ's ministers do not always enjoy. On the contrary, they are often straitened with languor, want of life and freedom in themselves. Their
spirits

spirits are often damped, and their hearts discouraged by the deadness and lukewarmness of others ;—that after much labour and toil, little visible success appears ;—there is no ingathering, but great stupidity and security reigns among those whose good they sincerely wish and labour for. Painful consideration this to the faithful labourer in Christ's vineyard, to see all his labours lost, or turn to so little effect in his Master's service : But under such a melancholy and discouraging case, our

III. Observation is proper to afford direction and comfort, to wit, That though Ministers and Christians do not at present see the good effects of their pious intentions and labours, they are not thence to conclude, that their labours are entirely useless and without effect, nor to sit down in despondence, as though no good would ever arise from them, but persevere in their earnest prayers and pious endeavours, not knowing which is to prosper, the seed sown in the morning or in the evening, and assuring themselves, that whatever be the present appearances, they shall in due time reap if they faint not. Though little or no desirable effects appear to arise from their labours at present, yet even now they may answer an important purpose, to check and restrain the overflowings of ungodliness, which might otherwise, to much greater degrees, prevail ; or to lay a foundation and prepare the way for a yet glorious harvest in some future time, either in their own day, or the days of those who are to come after and succeed them in their labours, when they are perhaps dead and gone. This seems plainly to be intimated by our Lord in the text.—*Herein*, saith he, *is that saying true, one soweth and another reapeth.* I sent you to reap that on which ye bestowed no labour. Other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours.

God is the sovereign dispenser of his own favours, and confers them in what manner, and at what time to him seems best. The labours of some men, though they make little or no appearance as to any good effect in their own day, yet they often prepare the way for joyful and glorious events in the days of those who come after them. Thus the preaching of the Patriarchs and Prophets prepared the way for great and glorious things in the days of Christ, and the preaching of Christ prepared the way for yet greater and more glorious effects from the preaching of the Apostles; and thus one minister is no doubt often made the harbinger or forerunner to prepare the way and usher in great and glorious things in the days of his successor. Though little or no visible good effect appears from his ministry in his own day; yet the seed is not lost, it may take root, spring up, and bear fruit to the glory of God, when he is laid in his grave; so that both he that soweth and he that reapeth, may yet rejoice together with exceeding great joy; the one in having sown the seed, and the other in having reaped the harvest. This is a most animating and encouraging argument for ministers, after having put their hands to the Gospel-plough, not to look back or sit down discouraged under present ill success; and also for pious parents and friends, who have hitherto seen all their prayers and pious counsels of little effect for any good to their children or others, still to persevere in fervent prayer and unwearied endeavours for their conversion and salvation, not knowing what or when will be the effect. Great and glorious effects may yet attend their labours, even in their own days, or if not, yet in the days of those who succeed them when they are laid in the grave. The sermons of faithful ministers, and the counsels of pious parents and friends, have in a multitude of instances been known to
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take such hold of the minds of their hearers and children, that though in the heat of youth, the pursuits of pleasure, or hurry of business, they may, for a time, be oppressed and buried in oblivion, that no good effect of them is seen in their lives and conversation, (perhaps for years; yet after all, these same pious instructions, counsels and exhortations of their ministers, parents and friends, have been brought to remembrance; like a barbed arrow pierced them to the heart, with the bitter remembrance of their sin and folly, for rejecting these counsels so long, and under the influence of the Spirit of God, have been blessed to a real change of heart and life. Is not this an argument sufficient to encourage us all to go on in this benevolent work; the prospect of being the happy and honoured instrument of gathering and bringing others to the participation of that eternal life, which we wish and hope for as our own supreme, complete and never-ending felicity? Sure if any thing can animate our hearts, and set our souls on fire, it must be this:—Love to our neighbour and ourselves, their interest, and our own honour, all conspire to encourage and engage us in it; for they that turn many to righteousness, the wise man saith, *shall shine forth as the sun in the firmament, and as the stars for ever and ever.* But,

IV. Should we be so unhappy as to be wholly unsuccessful, and neither in our own nor in the days of those who follow us, any visible good effects appear from our labours, (but be like seed that rots under the clods and never comes up at all); yet, if we are truly faithful labourers, we shall not miss of our reward in the world above, however unsuccessful we may be in this. *Though Israel be not gathered, said the Prophet, I shall be glorious in the sight of the Lord.* Was it not for this reflection,

I know not how any serious conscientious minister of Christ, who sincerely wishes the salvation of the souls committed to his charge, could have heart to preach under long-continued visible ill success. With all the supports and comfortable assurance which the word of God affords in the case to the faithful labourer, he oft feels the discouragement so great as almost to sit down in dispondence, and in the anguish of his soul bemoan his case in the plaintive language of the Prophet, *Who hath believed our report, and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?* I have toiled all the day; I have spent my strength for nought; they are not, they will not be gathered. He is hence led to serious enquiry and deep humiliation, with respect to his own views and conduct in the discharge of this great work; but when, upon careful and humble examination, he can, notwithstanding his many imperfections and defects, find that he does sincerely aim at, study and strive for the promotion of God's glory and the good of souls; when, with Peter, he can say, *Lord thou knowest that I love thee*, and with Paul, *That in simplicity and godly sincerity, I have had my conversation in the world*; then, upon the assurance of the word of God, he may have confidence, and take comfort in the darkest hour. Happy is the minister, happy the Christian who has this testimony of a good conscience towards God and man! It is worth more than the applause of the whole world without it. O! that we may all know its worth, by its comforting testimony in our own souls! I, as the minister or sower sent to sow the seed, to reap and gather in this spiritual harvest, and you as those to be gathered in.—This will be to our mutual comfort here, and our mutual everlasting joy hereafter. That this may be the case, is it not of importance that we all enquire how we have and do discharge the several trusts

trusts reposed in us, and duties incumbent upon us? I; in sowing the seed of the word, and you in hearing, receiving and assisting in bringing it forward to the harvest. This is an enquiry proper and important for you as well as for me, and that in proportion to all the advantages you have had, and the number of labourers in or sowers of the word that have been among you. The seed of the word which was sown by Christ and his Apostles, hath been continued down to you.* Numbers have been sent in Christ's stead, from time to time, to sow and reap among you, who have been called one after another out of the field, and others sent to succeed in their place and labours; and last of all, I also am sent to sow the word and labour in the vineyard of Christ among you. O that it may be the seed and favour of eternal life to many, to all your souls! O that I may be able to say with my blessed Master, when he beheld the forward and eager disposition of these Samaritans pressing to see him, and hear his gracious word, *Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are already white to harvest*; that as your fields are now ripe for the sickle, and ye preparing to gather the joyful harvest into your barns, so there may be a willingness to hear, and a readiness or ripeness to be reaped and gathered in by the Gospel of Christ in every soul in this congregation, and a rich and glorious harvest ensue by my ministry among you. I have already been
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* 1. Rev. Thomas Hanford, who came from Old England, and settled as minister of this church, as near as can be determined by the town-records, in 1653, and died 1693.

2. Rev. Stephen Buckingham, installed 1697, dismissed 1726 or 1727.

3. Rev. Moses Dickinson, installed 1727, died 1778.

4. Rev. William Tennant, ordained and installed as a colleague to Mr Dickinson, 1765, dismissed and removed to Charlestown, South-Carolina, 1772.

these three years and more labouring in the ministry of the word among you.—What increase have ye yielded? What fruit have ye borne to the Master of the vineyard, the heavenly Husbandman? I blame you not, nor charge you with any want of attention or respect to myself or ministry. Nay, on this account, I have reason hitherto to speak well of you as a congregation; ye have ever treated me with respect, and regularly attended upon my public instructions;—but yet, this notwithstanding, may I not ask, have these my instructions and labours among you answered their designed end? Have they been the means of any ingathering? Have they been blessed to awaken, convince, convert, and bring home any soul to the divine Husbandman? This is surely a question of great importance to you all, and which I assure you sometimes seriously exercises my own mind.—What will it signify that ye treat me with respect, and in general attend regularly upon my ministry among you, which is indeed pleasing, and merits commendation from me, if after all ye be not gathered into Christ, by a cordial acceptance of and submission to him in the characters and offices in which he is exhibited in the Gospel? Shall I study, labour and toil for your salvation, and yet be the honoured and happy instrument of saving none of you? Where then will be my crown, which ye must be in the Lord? Will the bare civility and respect with which you treat me, or the supply of my necessities which you grant me, satisfy me without any further wish or concern for your good? I must be basely ungrateful to, and unworthy of that all-gracious Master, whose servant I am, if this can be the case. I trust I have a witness in your consciences, that it is not the case; and I think I can truly say, that my heart's desire and fervent prayer to God concerning you is, that ~~if~~ you may all be saved. On this occasion,

occasion, when your ripened harvest, the ears loaded with grain, bend down their heads in your fields to invite the sharp sickle of the ingatherer, I cannot but express a wish,—I cannot but devoutly pray, that so your hearts might yield to the impression of God's word, which is the sword of the Spirit, and that there may be a glorious harvest or ingathering to Jesus Christ among you. This would rejoice my heart, even mine; and believe it, my friends, you must be gathered to Christ, with his friends in this world, or with his enemies in the world to come; for there is a very different, an awful harvest approaching, in which, if you are not reaped and gathered in mercy and joy, you must in judgment, sorrow, and pain, to be burned and tormented for ever:—they who are not reaped and gathered to Christ, by the ministry of his word and servants in this world, the Scripture informs us, shall be finally reaped, *bound in bundles and burned as chaff in unquenchable fire.* Read the account, and let every sinner who has never yet been gathered into Christ, or become a true member of his kingdom, tremble. And in the time of harvest, saith our Lord, *I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn. The tares are the children of the wicked one. The enemy that sowed them is the Devil,—the harvest is the end of the world, and the reapers are the Angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so shall it be in the end of the world, the Son of Man shall send forth his Angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity, and he shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.* Let these solemn truths sink deep
into

into all your hearts. Let them dwell with you in your houses; carry them with you into your fields, and when you are plowing and sowing; when you are reaping, binding up, and carrying your harvest into your barns, remember the time is fast approaching when you must all take your part in a far more important and interesting harvest; when you must be bound up in bundles for eternal life, or severed as chaff from the wheat for eternal burnings. Let me then intreat you now, while you stand in the field, where the seed, the blessed word of life, is sown, the culture of divine ordinances, and the influences of the Holy Spirit are offered and afforded, that ye see to it that ye remain not still tares, but that the seed of the word take deep root in your hearts, and bear fruit unto eternal life; so shall ye, as good wheat, be gathered into the garner of the heavenly Husbandman, and with the righteous shine like the sun in the kingdom of your Father, for ever and ever. And while you are thus careful for your own interest and salvation, in that solemn day, forget not, I pray you, the concern you ought to have for the interest and salvation of others also. You are in some respects to be fellow-labourers with me in the field of Christ. Though it is my work principally and more publicly to sow the seed, to cultivate and gather in the precious harvest for the divine Husbandman, it is yours also, according to your several places and abilities, in a subordinate way, to assist me herein. Ye who are placed in families, whom God hath blessed with children and servants, are in an especial manner called to this important work,—to bend the tender mind, and “teach the young idea how to shoot.” Much depends upon your aid in this particular, to prepare these young and tender growths for fruitfulness in the garden of God, by early seasoning their minds with religious instruction, training them

them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and, like faithful Abraham of old, commanding your children and household to keep the way of the Lord. This greatly assists and alleviates the ministerial labourer, in bringing prepared and understanding minds to the public instructions of the church; but where family-government and family-instruction are neglected, or little attended to, there is commonly less good to be expected from public instruction. Ye have all then, to whom the government and direction of families are committed, an important work to attend to in this spiritual husbandry. Nor are those exempt who are not thus connected: None can say I have nothing to do, and so sit down quiet and unconcerned about the welfare of others, because he is not the head and master of a family. Here is work for all. Every man has friends, connections and acquaintance, if not children and servants, whose spiritual interest he is bound by all proper and prudent methods to promote, before whom he is commanded to let his light so shine as to lead them to glorify their Father who is in heaven. None then have a right to say with selfish Cain, *Am I my brother's keeper?* and rest unconcerned and take no care about the souls of others, but are to pray for, and by all proper means strive to promote their eternal welfare. And especially, if any of you hope that God has been gracious to your souls, that you have tasted and seen that the Lord is good, let me exhort you to imitate your divine Master, of whose goodness you have tasted, and by whose Spirit you profess to be actuated. Let it be with you as it was with him, your *meat and drink to do the will of him who hath sent you* into the vineyard, and employed you according to your several stations, to labour in gathering in his harvest, to do his will and finish his work. Evidence the sense you have of his divine

goodness,

goodness, and the supreme excellency of Jesus Christ this way. Imitate the conduct of the Samaritan woman, who, as soon as she was convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, immediately hastened away to call her friends and fellow-citizens to his acquaintance, saying, *I have found a man who hath told me all that ever I did, is not this the Christ?* Thus go to your children and domestics, your friends and acquaintance, with words of love and kindness, invite them to come, taste and see how good the Lord is; set before them the beauty and loveliness of the Lord Jesus Christ, the pleasure and delight, the safety and happiness there is in his service; shew them their absolute, their perishing need of an interest in his favour; and enforce the whole with a conduct which shall demonstrate your own belief of these truths, and which shall shew them how tenderly you love them, how much you have their best interest at heart. Should you be so happy as, with the woman of Samaria, to prevail with them, like the Samaritans, to whom she spake of Christ, to come and see, taste and believe on their own experience, what an everlasting source of joy and consolation will it be to you! It will be a source of great joy and consolation even in this world; but, O! how much greater in the world to come! Ye who are parents, think what an unspeakable pleasure and satisfaction it will be for the beloved husband and wife to meet the dear pledges of their mutual love, in complete happiness and glory in heaven. What higher wish can enter? what greater joy can swell the parent's heart than this? How happy will be the meeting of dear and long-separated friends in that world of joy and felicity! How agreeable and transporting the interview of the beloved husband and wife, the honoured parent and his dear children, affectionate brothers and sisters, and the faithful minister and his dear people, who have

have died in the Lord! Then will they welcome and congratulate each other on the heavenly shore. Then will they sweetly mingle souls in continued rapture of eternal love and joy. I am lost in the prospect; the language of mortals cannot paint the tender, the transporting scene. *Eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive what God hath laid up for them that love him.* Angels and spirits in happiness only can describe it in perfection: to this happiness let us all aspire; for this, let us all incessantly labour and be assistant to each other.

And now, reverend and dear Sir, as the subject, compared with our circumstances, so naturally leads to it, permit me to address a few words to you on this occasion. *Herein, saith our Lord to his disciples, is that saying true, One soweth and another reapeth; other men laboured, and ye have entered into their labours.* Behold! this scripture literally fulfilled in you and me. In the days of my youth I was, by the laying on of the hands, and particular designation of the presbytery, placed in this part of the great field of Christ's church, where numbers of faithful labourers had been before, with a solemn charge to labour in it and watch over it. For several years I devoted myself to this my charge; and though with many imperfections I acknowledge I did it, yet never with a dishonest heart.—In troublous and perilous times* I kept it, laboured in it, and watched over it,—readily contributing both by word and deed whatever was in my power for its protection, cultivation and growth, in the fruits of truth and righteousness.—But the great Lord both of the field and the harvest, that universal Governor, by whom the fate of empires and the sparrow's fall are equally directed, has, in his all-wise and
righteous

* The late war.

righteous providence, called me from this to labour in another part of the vineyard, and you from another to labour in this.—May we both be enabled to discharge our respective trusts with fidelity, and each have the unspeakable satisfaction to see much fruit of our labours, many souls gathered in by our instrumentality, who, in that last great and general harvest, in which the angels of God are to be the reapers, shall be as seals of our ministry, and crowns of our rejoicing; with whom, and with all the faithful, gathered from the four corners of the earth, may we rejoice together in presence of God and the Lamb, for ever and ever.

And you, my brethren of this congregation, once the dear people of my charge, receive my congratulations on this occasion, and suffer the word of exhortation.—I rejoice that ye are again settled in the order of the Gospel, under the care of a pastor of acknowledged probity and worth, to instruct and gather you;—submit yourselves to him as to the servant of Christ, sent to watch for your souls as one that must give an account;—that he may do it with joy, and not with grief, which would be unprofitable to you. Reverence and respect him as the ambassador and messenger of the Lord, honouring him for his office and work's sake. Exercise a spirit of candour and tenderness in all your thoughts of and conduct towards him;—spread a mantle of love over his failings, if any he should have, remembering that perfection is not the lot of mortals.—Never suffer the baneful principle of prejudice, or groundless jealousy and suspicion to take possession of your breasts.—Like the fly in the pot of ointment, it will spoil a thousand otherwise commendable qualities.—Like the fever, it will destroy your sense and taste of that which is just and good.—Like the jaundice, it will present all objects in false colours. As it was said
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of our Lord, that he could not do many mighty works in a certain place, because of their unbelief, so it is morally impossible that any great good should be done among that people where prejudice reigns; should a man live like a saint, and preach like an angel, it would be all lost upon those whose minds are thus shut and fast barred from beholding it.—Would you then wish to be benefited by the labours of your minister, ever beware of and guard against this baneful principle.

While he is sowing to you in spiritual things, think not much to impart of your worldly things, but communicate liberally an honourable and comfortable support, that, free from the distracting care how he shall provide for the necessary subsistence of his family, he may give himself wholly to his ministry; bring beaten oil into the sanctuary, and feed your souls with divine wisdom and knowledge. And to all your other kindness and respect, add also your daily fervent prayers to the throne of grace, for the gifts of the Holy Spirit, to descend, to furnish him to, and render him successful in his great work. Prayers for a minister are like the hands of Aaron and Hur, supporting the arms of Moses. A praying people, saith one, will make a preaching minister. To engage you to the performance of all these duties, frequently consider the solemn account you must one day give of his, and the labours of all others, who have been from time to time among you. You have been a highly privileged people. Many labourers, in succession, have been sent among you, and yet the Lord of the harvest hath sent another *. May

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* 1. Rev. Mr. Magnish, or Macnish.

2. Rev. Mr Cross, who was dismissed and removed to Philadelphia.

3. Rev. Mr Wilmot.

4. Rev.

a glorious harvest, indeed, arise from his labours, and you with him, and all those before sent to labour among you, rejoice together in the kingdom of glory.

Now, unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy; to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and for ever. Amen.

4. Rev. David Bostwick, who was dismissed to take the charge of the Presbyterian church in New-York.—The time of settlement, and death, or removal of the above, unknown.

5. Rev. Isaac Mills, ordained and installed 1762, died in the spring 1774.

6. Rev. Matthias Burnet, received their call, and went to reside with them in the fall of 1774, was ordained and installed April 1775, dismissed May 1785, and re-settled at Norwalk, in Connecticut, November 2. 1785.

7. Rev. George Faitoute, their present minister, installed December 15. 1789.

SER.

S E R M O N XVIII.

THE NATURE AND NECESSITY OF
GOOD WORKS.

BY

GEORGE FAITOUTE, A. M.

Minister of a Presbyterian Church, Jamaica, Long-Island.

PSALM CXVI. 9.

I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living.

BRETHREN, if the tree be good, its fruit will be good also; and if the heart of any man be right with God, so will the tenor of his life be.

Whatever pretences men may make of love, or regard to God, they cannot be accounted his sincere friends, but by an answerable external conduct. The reality of our faith cannot be well proved or ascertained, without good works; for *faith without works is dead, being alone*, saith the Apostle James; and *these things*, saith St Paul to Titus, *I will, that thou affirm constantly, that they who have believed in God, might be careful to maintain good works;*

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these things are good and profitable unto men. Consonant to this is the promise, or solemn vow of the Psalmist, in the words just read in your hearing; *I will, saith he, walk before the Lord in the land of the living.* Here we may take notice,

1. Of the matter of the duty in which the Psalmist promiseth to engage, expressed in the words, *I will walk.* This phrase is taken differently by commentators; some take it for an expression of his confidence in the continuance of God's favour towards him; that God, who had freed him from the jaws of death, would now continue him in the land of the living.

And so they interpret the passage thus, *I shall walk*; that is, *I shall be preserved, and continue some time longer on earth, to advance the glory of God.* By others, it is understood as expressing a duty on man's part, rather than a kindness on the part of God; in this sense of the word I would rather acquiesce, as this phrase is most commonly in Scripture used to express a duty. It was required of Abraham as a duty to walk before God: *I am the Almighty God, walk before me, and be thou perfect.*

The Psalmist, in this place, by expressing his purpose under a solemn promise, binds himself to perform the duty promised; the word *walk* implies motion, and a proceeding on in that motion, step by step, and from one place to another. Taken metaphorically, it signifies the practice of what is good and lovely, as the words following intimate.

2. The manner in which he purposed to walk before the Lord, that is, in such a manner, that God, the Searcher of hearts, would be pleased with it, and approve of it.

3. The *place* and *time*, while he continued on earth, and remained among the living.

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The single doctrine from the words to which I shall speak at this time, is this, That our inward affection to God must be declared, or manifested, by our outward conversation: I shall,

I. Confirm the proposition.

II. Shew you why our inward affection to God must be declared by our outward conversation.

III. Consider the necessity of good works.

First, I will endeavour to confirm the proposition, that inward affection to God must be declared by our outward conversation.

That inward affection to God is to be manifested by an outward walk with God, may be proved by that connection which there is between them. The one cannot be without the other; so in Scripture, walking in God's ways, and keeping his commandments, is inferred from the fear and love we have of him. *Blessed is every one that feareth the Lord, that walketh in his ways.* Fear God and keep his commandments, saith Solomon; and St John tells us, *This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.*

Moreover, this duty is frequently pressed in the Scriptures. We find God commanding Abraham to walk before him. *I am the Almighty God, walk before me, and be thou perfect.*—And now Israel, *what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways.* And this kind of walking is highly commended:—*These are the generations of Noah; Noah was a just man, and perfect in his generation; and Noah walketh with God.* To the same purpose is that declaration, concerning Zacharias and Elizabeth; *they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.*

Besides, walking before the Lord has been abundantly rewarded; and therefore says the Psalmist, *Great is their peace who love thy law, and nothing shall offend them; and in keeping thy commandments there is a great reward.* How distinguished a reward did the righteous Lord bestow on the pious Enoch? *And Enoch walketh with God, and he was not, for God took him.* And such will be the reward of all, who walk before the Lord in the land of the living. Sooner or later God will take them home to himself.

Secondly, I am to shew, why our inward affection to God must be declared by our outward conversation. This will appear from the following considerations.

1. In this way God is glorified. By a holy practice, we shew forth the praises of him who hath called us out of darkness into his marvellous light? and thus, *Men may see our good works, and glorify our Father who is in Heaven.* The more fruitful we are in good works, the more is God our maker glorified; for herein, says our Lord, *is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit.* Now, what can be more desirable than to honour the glorious Father of our spirits? *A son honoureth his father, saith a prophet, and a servant his master.* Shall we then call those men sons of God, and servants of the Most High, who are regardless of the glory of God, and remain unmoved by a motive so good and powerful? Since walking piously glorifies God, all who have an inward affection for him will carefully maintain good works. A due esteem of God is manifested only by making him our supreme end. And so we are directed by the Apostle Paul, to aim in all we do at the glory of God, *Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.*

2. By an holy and righteous walk others are benefited.

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We know not how much good those around us sometimes reap, from an observation of the purity, benevolence, and zeal, of their fellow Christians.

Those who are called of God, are stirred up to an holy emulation at the view: saith the Apostle to the Hebrews, *Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.* All those who walk aright become patterns with others, *so that ye were*, saith the Apostle Paul, *ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.* And those who are not yet effectually called by the grace of God, may be brought over to the love of the truth, by a conversation becoming the Gospel. Thus speaks the Apostle Peter, *Likewise ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that if any obey not the word, they also may, without the word, be won by the conversation of the wives; having a good conscience; that whereas they speak evil of you as of evil doers, they may be ashamed, who falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.* To promote the spiritual good, the best interest of all around us, is an object worthy of men, and of Christians; and the probability that we may, by any just means, effect this, should induce us to make it our endeavour; but their best good cannot be promoted so successfully any other way, as by a patient continuance in well doing, and manifesting our love to God by a holy practice.

3. In this way too our own good is promoted.

It is by a good conversation, that the security of our hearts, the integrity of our consciences, the soundness of our faith, and in a word, the truth of all our graces are clearly manifested, cherished, and increased. If we content ourselves with saying, *Lord, Lord, and do not the*

things which be faith, our profession is plainly insincere; it is hypocrisy. If we maintain not a conversation becoming the Gospel, our consciences are defiled, our faith is dead, inactive and useless.

By a good conversation, the presence of the Holy Spirit in us is testified to our own peace and comfort. All the various graces of the Christian are so many fruits of the Spirit, wrought in him by the Holy Ghost; and therefore, a holy practice proves the presence of the Holy Spirit with us.

In this way, too, is gained the assurance of God's love, and outward evidence is given of our election and salvation.

Besides, by such a walk many judgments are either prevented or removed, softened or sanctified; and what is still a greater blessing, destruction from the Almighty will be happily avoided:—Hereby shall we escape from deserved and unutterable despair, and get into the path of life, the way of peace, and the happy road to joys unspeakable and full of glory. How great, my hearers, will be the gain of piety, both here and hereafter!

Thirdly, I come now to consider a little the necessity of good works.

The importance and necessity of good works can be easily maintained, without ascribing to them any merit or any influence in our justification; and although we press not the doing of good works as being meritorious, yet there are forcible reasons or arguments, from which we may urge the great necessity of them. And,

1. They are highly necessary, as being commanded and expressly required by God himself.

Whatever God requires in his word, must be done. Obedience is necessary, and therefore holiness of heart and life is indispensably necessary. That good works are
required

required of Christians will not be doubted by any, who are in the least acquainted with the Bible. *Let ours also, saith an Apostle, learn to maintain good works for necessary uses; and saith the same inspired writer, This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they who have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works, these things are good and profitable unto men.* Where the word of a king is; there is power; and is there no authority in the precepts of Heaven? No obedience due to the commands of the living God? How dwelleth the fear and love of God in those men who violate the divine law, and trample on the dread authority of the Most High? Surely a holy walk with God is necessary, since it is enjoined by himself.

2. Good works are the way to the kingdom of God.

For though they are by no means to be considered as the *cause* of our reigning in heaven, yet without them we shall never attain to the kingdom; we shall never see God; so speaks the Apostle Paul, *Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.* The sum of felicity consists in the enjoyment of the ever blessed God. They who being born of God by the regenerating influences of the Holy Spirit, live a holy and humble life, shall know by sweet and happy experience, that in the presence of God *there is fulness of joy, and at his right hand, to which distinguished honour they shall soon be happily advanced, there are pleasures for evermore.*

3. Good works are an evidence or demonstration of our faith.

The Apostle James, speaking of the faith of Abraham, and how it was proved to be genuine, says, *Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?* And a fruitless inactive faith, which produceth not the fruits of righteousness, is by the same

Apostle

Apostle denominated, *a dead faith*. Works are therefore necessary, as *evidences of our faith*; and in this way only can it be proved to be genuine, a true and living faith.

To evidence our faith is of great importance, and highly necessary, as without it, it is impossible to please God, or to escape eternal wo—*be that believeth not shall be damned*. How vastly necessary then are good works, as they are a demonstration of the truth and reality of our faith?

4. The not doing of them merits eternal death.

For although we must disagree with those who suppose that doing good works merits everlasting life, yet we know that the most exquisite torments of the damned, will be no more than the just reward of their impious deeds.

Whatever stores of wrath are reserved for the wicked, they are but the treasures which guilty sinners have hoarded up for themselves.—*But after thy hardness and impenitent heart*, saith St Paul, *treasrest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God*; and the same inspired writer tells us, that *the wages of sin is death*. If then indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, shall be upon them who obey not the truth, and on every soul of man that doth evil, how necessary are good works? How careful should we be to walk in the way of God's commandments? With what diligence and zeal ought all men to serve the Lord in their day and generation?

5. The necessity of good works will appear, if we consider them as expressions of our gratitude. It is indeed true, that when we have done all those things which are commanded, we may still say, we are unprofitable servants. However, by doing what we are commanded, according to our ability, we show ourselves grateful children of

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our Father, who is in Heaven. And I think this is an argument of more weight with an ingenuous child of God, than any motive which can be drawn from *merit*, or the *supposed worth* of our obedience. For when the Christian pondereth on the free grace, and boundless mercy of God, in giving his own Son, in accepting the returning sinner for Christ's sake, in pardoning all his sins, and in reserving for him everlasting life, it tends so to inflame his heart with love and gratitude, that he is always ready to do whatsoever he thinks may be well-pleasing in the sight of God, even to the utmost of his power.

Gratitude to God is our duty; it is a delightful and necessary duty; it is, and will be performed by all that love God. But good works are the genuine fruits of a grateful disposition, and without them, it will never be suitably expressed. Hath the blessed God loaded us with benefits, and followed us with loving kindness and tender mercies, and shall his people, shall any who call themselves Christians, break his laws, and trample on the authority by which they are enacted? Can any suppose that such conduct will be a grateful return to the Father of our mercies? Oh! what a rich gift was that, when God gave us his own Son? Is it for this, that poor sinners despise and disobey him, and rush on the bucklers of the Almighty?

I shall now proceed to make some application of the subject.

1. This subject teacheth us, that those who walk not in God's ways, cannot be esteemed his affectionate people. For whoever hath a due regard to the Supreme Jehovah, whoever truly fears and loves him, will testify his regard to him by a devout and holy conversation. Inward affection to God will make us fear, and fly from the very appearance

appearance of evil. No sin will be indulged, nor permitted to dwell in *that heart*, where love to God is predominant. If we do indeed love Christ, we shall keep his commandments. These will not be grievous, but most pleasant and delightful:—*Oh! how I love thy holy law; it is my meditation all the day*, said pious David; and St Paul says, *I delight in the law of God after the inward man*. And who can help loving and delighting in the law of God, when he considers that the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good?

2. The knowledge, affection and profession of persons who walk not before the Lord, are all in vain. For those things will be so many evidences against them, will render them the more inexcusable, and aggravate their final judgment. I confess that the knowledge of God, an esteem of him, and an outward profession, are all necessary and useful. For a religion without knowledge must needs be preposterous and erroneous; without affection, mere hypocrisy; and without an open and free profession, no better than cowardice. But though these things are necessary, yet they are not sufficient, and the truth of them all may be justly questioned, where they are not ratified and confirmed by an answerable conduct.

3. That walking with God, in the external duties of religion, will best stop the mouths of the adversaries of the truth. The enemies of our religion take the more occasion to slander it when they see Christians walking carelessly, and untenderly. Oh! take heed that you give no occasion to the enemies of Christ to blaspheme. Make conscience of good works; study to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present evil world.

4. Lastly, we learn from what has been said, that those who walk not before the Lord in the land of the living, are exposed to the most dreadful ruin. O sinners! deniers

niers of God! deniers of Christ the Saviour of the world! rejecters of heaven, and travellers to hell! what can be said to you to stop you in your dangerous career to ruin? What can be done, what would I not do, to snatch you from the strokes of Almighty vengeance? O stop for a moment, and look forward to that gulph of despair into which you are just ready to plunge! Methinks I see some of my hearers already tottering on the brink of damnation, and yet fearless, yet unconcerned! *Awake thou that sleepest, arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.* Fly, poor thoughtless soul, from the wrath to come; instantly fly, lest wrath come upon you to the very uttermost, and your never-dying soul be for ever lost! The God of the spirits of all flesh is your enemy; devils are your enemies, and the whole herd of the ungodly will shortly become *mutual tormentors*. Not a single friend will you meet with, in all the regions of misery—no, nor in heaven itself, shall so much as one be found to pity or relieve you; but you must lie down in overwhelming sorrows, and welter in flames unquenchable for ever! But alas! the forlorn condition of careless disobedient mankind, shall exceed all the powers of description! Perhaps nothing but the groans of the damned, which may none of you, dear brethren, ever hear, could give even a faint view of *their* wretched state, whom Christ the Lord will disown and cast off for ever! Be entreated, therefore, to come to God through Jesus Christ. Cast off the works of darkness, and put on the armour of light, and thus glorifying your Father in Heaven, you may hope, in due time, to dwell for ever with the Lord. Now to him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the throne, be ascribed all honour, praise and glory, henceforth and for ever.
Amen.

S E R.

SERMON XIX.

A CAUTION AGAINST DECLENSION IN THE WAYS OF PRACTICAL PIETY.

BY

JOHN RODGERS, D. D.

One of the Ministers of the United Presbyterian Churches,
in the City of New-York.

GAL. vi. 9.

*Let us not be weary in well-doing; for in due season we
shall reap, if we faint not.*

THE intimate knowledge of human nature, that
shines through the whole religion of Jesus, deserves
to be numbered among the evidences of its divinity,

It hereby appears, that its Author is none other than the
Author of our nature. This knowledge is conspicuous
among other things, in that aptitude there is in the doc-
trines, the precepts, the promises, and the threatenings of
the Gospel, together with the facts recorded in the sacred
oracles, to govern the will and regulate the passions, as
well as inform the understanding. For this purpose, every
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power of the human mind is addressed, and every principle of action in the soul is touched in the manner best calculated to accomplish these ends.

Among these principles, none more powerful and operative than the desire of happiness. A principle planted by the Author of nature in every human breast; and which, therefore, is a rational and scriptural source of action. It is not, indeed, the principle from which true love to God flows, nor ought it to be the primary source of our obedience. These are the transcendent excellence of the Divine character, and a conscientious regard to God's governing authority.

But though a regard to our own happiness ought not to be the primary source of our obedience, yet it is a source, and we may, we ought to be influenced by it in the whole of our Christian deportment. It ought to have a chief place among the motives of our conduct, though not *the* chief. This is evident from the address to it in the words of our text. *Let us not be weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.*

There are two things in the text that deserve our special notice.

An evil against which we are guarded. *Be not weary in well-doing.* And the argument whereby we are guarded against this evil; and the contrary temper and conduct recommended and enforced, which you have in these words; *for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not: Reap a harvest of eternal joy.* There is a manifest allusion in our text, and the two preceding verses, to those remarkable seasons of the year, seed-time and harvest. *Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let*

let us not be weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.—Here the Apostle compares this life to the season in which the farmer sows his seed, and the future state to the succeeding harvest. He hereby teaches us this important truth, that our temper and conduct in this life, bear the same relation to a coming judgment and an eternal state, that the farmer's sowing his seed does to the following harvest. This life is the seed-time, eternity the season for reaping the fruit of our doings, whether they be good or bad.

What I propose from the words, by the aids of the Spirit of grace, is,

I. Briefly explain the evil against which we are guarded in the text.

II. Shew why we should guard against this evil, and pursue a contrary line of conduct.

Let us enquire, *first*, what is the nature of the evil against which we are guarded in the text—*Be not weary in well-doing*. And for this purpose it is not improper we should briefly touch upon the nature of the *well-doing* here intended, that we may be enabled the more easily to understand what it is to be *weary* of it.

By well-doing here, we are to understand, in general, the duties we owe to God, our neighbour, and ourselves. These are of great extent; they are many in number, and important in their nature. There is not a single relation we sustain to God, or to each other, but what is fruitful of a variety of these duties. You will not expect I should enter into a particular consideration of them in this place. This would constitute a system of practical divinity. Let it suffice, at present, to observe, that they include all that the sacred oracles mean by piety towards God; by justice, benevolence and humanity towards our neighbour,
and

and by sobriety and temperance in our conduct towards ourselves. These the gospel of Christ teaches us with great care. It teaches us, *that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God; and our Saviour Jesus Christ.*

Those duties are called *well-doing*, because in a conscientious observance of them we do well; we comply with the approving will of God. But, though this phrase may be taken in this large extent, the connection of our text with the preceding part of the chapter, would seem to point us to some particular duties; as more especially designed by the term; those that have for their more immediate object the happiness of our fellow-creatures: Such as mutual love and forbearance one towards another; compassion to the distressed; humility of deportment and acts of beneficence to all. The Apostle also appears to have an eye to those duties, which more immediately tend to the advancement of the cause of God in the world; particularly the support of the gospel of Christ. Thus in the sixth verse of our context: *Let him, that is taught in the word, communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things.* And it is not improbable but that the Apostle may distinguish these duties by the title of *well-doing*, because of their influence on the order and happiness of society, and the particular honour they reflect upon the religion of the Divine Redeemer.

The *weariness* in well-doing, against which we are here guarded, ordinarily begins in the loss of that relish for Divine things, and that pleasure in the ways of God, which the person may have had in days past. In proportion as we take pleasure in any duty, we are guarded against being weary in it. And this want of

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relish for the ways of God, flows from the loss of those views of Divine things, with which he may have been blest in the preceding course of his life.

The native consequence of this is, the frequent omission of the duties of religion.

Thus, when the person who has accustomed himself to secret or family prayer, frequently neglects these great duties, he has become weary in well-doing. And thus the man who has been wont to attend the public ordinances of God's worship, and contribute to their support, when he becomes negligent of them, when every trifle will keep him from the house of God, or serve as an excuse for his refusing to support the Gospel, he is weary in well-doing. Or suppose a person who has given himself away to God at his holy table, to become negligent of this ordinance, and repeatedly omit an attendance upon it, that person hereby shews he is weary in well-doing. God holds such conduct as a practical contempt of him, his Christ, and his Gospel, whatever those guilty may think of it. This also is the case of the man who relaxes in the practice of any virtue, especially if it be a virtue in which he may have studied to excel in days past. And it is eminently the case of the man, who is less careful to be useful than once he was, by filling up the duties of the station which God has assigned him in life. In a word, the allowed omission of any known duty to God or man, especially the frequent omission of it, is an evidence of being weary in well-doing, too decided to admit of a doubt.

The like may be said of the person who renounces the great doctrines of the Gospel, and either embraces those errors which corrupt their simplicity, and defeat their efficacy, or discarding all religion, avows the principles of infidelity. This prepares the way for that profaneness in life,

life, which but too frequently follows upon such apostacy from the truth. The man who having made a profession of religion, and had in some measure escaped from the pollutions of the world, when he associates with the profane; drinks with the drunkard; throws off the restraints which were wont to guard his lips from impious language; indulges to the gratifying his criminal passions; prostitutes holy time to the purposes of worldly business or amusements; and indulges himself in any species of iniquity, be it what it may, that man gives the most fatal evidence of his being weary in well-doing. This is, in the fullest sense of the term, *having put his hand to the plough, to look back*, and therefore, *he is not fit for the kingdom of God*. Thus much, briefly, for the nature of the evil against which we are guarded in the text. And you see from what has been said, there are several degrees in it; against the lowest of which we are carefully to guard. Which leads us to enquire,

II. Why we should guard against being thus weary in well-doing, and pursue the contrary line of conduct.

1. Because this evil, as described, is a fatal symptom of an unregenerate state.

True grace is a living principle, and wherever it is found in the heart, it always tends towards perfection. Thus we read, that *the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day*. I do not mean to tell you, that true grace does not admit of decays, that God's people may not decline far from their former life, and activity in the ways of holiness, or that they may not fall into sin, to the great dishonour of their profession.

We have many melancholy evidences that this may be the case. Witness a Joseph swearing by the life of Pharaoh; a David, in the case of Bathsheba and Uriah; a So-

Iomon, in turning aside after strange gods, when he had grown old ; a Peter, in denying his Lord ; with others on sacred record.

And have no instances of this kind fallen under your own observation ? Therefore, though the first degrees of weariness in well-doing, do not certainly evidence the want of grace in the heart, yet the last do ; and the first suggest just cause of fear that the heart may not be right with God ; and if they be indulged and persisted in, they assuredly evince the person to be *in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity*. For though the true believer suffers his decays in grace, he has his times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord ; and though he may fall into sin by the strength of his internal corruptions, or the power of temptation ; yet he rises again, repents of his iniquity, and doubles his watch ; as you may see in the several cases I have just mentioned.

Would you then, my brethren, assure yourselves of the truth of grace in your hearts ; would you make your calling and election sure, see that you guard against this evil in all its several stages. For even where the truth of grace is, yet in proportion as you grow weary in well-doing, and that in the lowest degree, the evidences of your grace diminish, and you lose the comforts of the Divine life.

2. Those who grow weary in well-doing, so as to forsake the ways of practical godliness, lose all their former labour and pains in religion. It is not enough that we begin in the ways of God, that we set out in the paths of piety, but we must *persevere* in them ;—we must endure to the end ; for he alone *that shall endure to the end, the same shall be saved*. And our Lord assures us, that *no man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God*. And God himself

elsewhere

elsewhere declares, that *if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.* To the same purpose you read, Ezek. xviii. 24. *But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: In his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die.* And is there no backslider in heart and way in my audience this day?—None who, having begun in the Spirit, are now ending in the flesh? See the folly of your conduct, and attend to that awful threatening: *The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways.* And this is just; for your conduct, while it brings assured ruin upon yourselves, highly reflects on the honour of God, as a Master.

The language of your conduct is, that you have tried his service, and found by experience, that it is unjust, impracticable, or destructive of your comfort. But can there be a representation of God and his ways more false in itself, or dishonourable to the Supreme Jehovah?

3. We ought not to grow weary in well-doing, for God is not weary in doing good to us. He not only gave us our being, but he holds our souls in life. By his visitation alone we are preserved. In him we live and move; by him we are fed, and clothed, and preserved. *He daily loadeth us with his benefits. He giveth us richly all things to enjoy.* In a word, he is a God full of compassion and gracious; long-suffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth. Nor are these mercies purely of a temporal nature; they not only supply the wants of our bodies, and provide for our comfortable accommodation in life; but they provide for the comforts, the holiness,

and the eternal happiness of our precious souls. Of this kind is all the rich provision of the Gospel, with all its ordinances and graces.

O! the rich plenty and variety, the Divine profusion, with which Jehovah pours his blessings, spiritual and temporal, upon us, and that with all the unremitting care, tenderness and assiduity of a God! It is base ingratitude then for us to be weary in well-doing.

4. We have many bright examples of patience and perseverance in well-doing, to encourage us not to be weary in it. This argument is urged by the Apostle, in this very point of view, in the following words: *Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, (and let us run with patience the race that is set before us; looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith. Many have trod this path in every age of the world. It hereby appears to be practicable; and when we are exhorted not to be weary in well-doing, we are only exhorted to be followers of them, who, through faith and patience, inherit the promises. It is a duty in which many have gone before us, and some of them in circumstances unspeakably more difficult than those in which we are called to it. Witness the many martyrs who have bled and burnt for Christ in one age and another of the world; but we are not called to resist unto blood, striving against sin.*

5. There is a glorious reward before us, if we do not grow weary in well-doing. This is the argument urged by the Apostle in our text; *for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.* This reward is not unfrequently conferred upon the people of God, in some degree, when they come to lie on a dying bed. Of this nature is that composure of spirit, and that serenity of mind, which
they

they often enjoy in that solemn hour. Of this same kind is that holy triumph over death and the grave, with which many of his people have taken their leave of time.

These arise sometimes from the review of a life humbly devoted to God; at other times, from a sweet sense of his love shed abroad in their souls, or it may be from both; but more generally they flow from a lively and a sure hope of everlasting life, through the atonement and intercession of their divine Redeemer. Thus David, when lying on the verge of time, could say, *Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; for this is all my salvation, and all my desire.* And have none of you witnessed the triumphs of a dying disciple of Jesus?

But this reward principally consists in that glorious immortality, which commences immediately on our departure from the body. Then it is the believer's experience demonstrates the truth of that declaration, *Verily there is a reward for the righteous.* This reward shall be conferred in part in the resurrection of the just. All true believers in Jesus shall then rise in honour and great glory; but this is not all; there will be degrees of honour conferred upon them, according to the nature of the services they have done for their Lord in this life. For as *there is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars, and as one star differeth from another star in glory, so also is the resurrection of the dead.* It will be no less conspicuous in the judgment of the great day. *Then shall the King say to them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat; I*

was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? Or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer, and say unto them, Verily, I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

This reward will not, indeed, be conferred upon the score of merit. Our best services are deeply stained with guilt, and wholly unprofitable to the Most High; but it will be nevertheless sure. It is rendered so by the unfailing promise of the God of truth. *And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones, a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple, verily, I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.* It is on this account, that it is represented as an act of *righteousness* in God, Hebrews vi. 10. *For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed towards his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.* Nor can any thing more strongly evince its certainty, than its being urged as a motive both to obedience and diligence in the ways of God; as in the following words: *Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.* To which we may add the words of our text, *Be not weary in well-doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.*

Again: It will be a full reward.

Never

Never did the most plenteous harvest reward the labours of the husbandman more certainly or fully, than the joys and glories of the future world shall reward the faithful, persevering and diligent disciples of Jesus. They shall enter into the joy of their Lord: the joy unspeakable and full of glory, which he purchased for them upon the cross, and of which he took possession in their name, when he ascended up on high, and sat down at the right-hand of God: *And they shall ever be with their Lord.*

Once more: This reward will bear some proportion to our faithfulness and diligence in our Lord's service here. It is one evident design of the parable of the ten pounds, entrusted by their Lord to the ten servants, to teach us this truth. You have this instructive parable, Luke xix. from the 13th to the 26th verse inclusive. *And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds; and said unto them, Occupy till I come. And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded these servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading.— Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds. And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant; because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds. And he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities. And another came, saying, Lord, behold here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin; for I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou laidest not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow. And he said unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not*
 2 sow:

for : wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury? And he said unto them that stood by, Take from him the pound, and give it to him that hath ten pounds. And they said unto him, Lord, he hath ten pounds. For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him. You will perceive the sums entrusted by their Lord to these servants were the same—to each man one pound; but the improvement is represented as different. By one it is tenfold—by another five; and you are carefully to remark, that the difference in the reward is proportioned to the difference in the improvement.

The man who had improved his one pound into ten; was made ruler over ten cities; and the man who had gained five pounds, was made ruler over five cities. Seeing then there is such a glorious reward in sure reserve for us, *let us not be weary in well-doing*. We have only to await God's appointed time for the full enjoyment thereof: for our text assures us, that *in due season we shall reap, if we faint not*.

I shall conclude with the few following directions.

1. As ever you would desire not to be weary in well-doing, beware of sloth in the ways of God. This is a sin natural to us; but there are few greater enemies to vital godliness than it is.
2. Beware of venturing on known sin, especially the sin to which you are most inclined. This we are particularly cautioned against in the forecited, Heb. xii. 1. This is what David calls by way of eminence, *his iniquity*. *I kept myself from mine iniquity*.

3. Keep

3. Keep close to God in the way of duty. God deals with us as rational creatures, and, therefore, requires that we should cleave to him in the various duties of his appointment; this is the gracious institution of Heaven.

4. Endeavour to keep the end of your course full in view. Be much in the exercise of that faith, which is the substance of things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen.

Lastly, Look to Christ for strength to preserve you from being weary in well-doing. Remember that *it hath pleased the Father, that in him should all fulness dwell*: therefore, we may of his fulness receive grace for grace. Be strong, therefore, in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And thus strengthened, may you be preserved from fainting, endure to the end, and in due season reap a rich harvest of eternal joy.

SER.

S E R M O N XX.

ON THE PURITY OF THE HEART.

BY

JOHN WITHERSPOON, D.D. L.L.D.

Col. N. C. P.

PROVERBS xxx. 7, 8, 9.

Two things have I required of thee, deny me them, not before I die: Remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me; lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.

My Brethren,

OUR dependent condition as creatures, and much more our dangerous condition as sinners, exposed to daily temptation, renders prayer a duty of the most absolute necessity. You must all be sensible, how frequent and pressing the exhortations to it are in the Holy Scriptures. And, indeed, there cannot be a better evidence of

of a right temper of mind, than an habitual disposition to the exercise of this duty.

But as prayer is a necessary duty, we ought to give the greater attention to the manner in which it is performed. We ought to ask only for such things as are truly safe and useful. We ought also to offer up our prayers with importunity, or reserve, according to the nature and comparative importance of those blessings we desire to obtain. All our wants are perfectly known to God; he is also the best judge of what is fit for us, and therefore, our petitions should be well weighed, and expressed in such terms, as, at the same time that they intimate our desires, leave much to himself, as to the measure and manner of satisfying them.

We have an excellent example of this pious and prudent conduct, in the prayer of the prophet Agur, just read in your hearing. All his requests are summed up in two general heads. These he seems to insist upon, as absolutely necessary to ask, with that humble, holy confidence, which is founded on the divine promise, that if we ask any thing agreeable to his will, he heareth us. He seems also to ask them, as what would fully satisfy him, and be sufficient for the comfort of the present life, and the happiness of the life to come. *Two things, says he, have I required of thee, deny me them not before, or, as it ought rather to be translated, until I die.*

These two requests are conceived in the following terms: *Remove far from me vanity and lies, give me neither poverty nor riches.* The first, viz. *Remove far from me vanity and lies*, evidently relates to the temper of his mind, and the state of his soul. The second, viz. *Give me neither poverty nor riches*, relates to his outward condition, or circumstances in the present life. There are two things in the general structure of this comprehensive prayer,

prayer, that merit your particular attention. *First*, The order of his request; beginning with what is of most importance, the temper of his mind, and his hope towards God; and then adding, as but deserving the second place, what related to his present accommodation.

Secondly, The connection of his requests. The choice he makes as to his temporal condition, is in immediate and direct subserviency to his sanctification. This is plain from the arguments with which he presses, or the reasons which he assigns for his second petition. *Give me neither poverty nor riches, lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.*

My brethren, I am persuaded that this subject can hardly be, at any time, unseasonable to a Christian assembly, as our misplaced, excessive, and unreasonable desires, are the greatest enemies to our progress in holiness, as well as to our comfort and peace. Perhaps, however, there are some circumstances that render it peculiarly proper for this auditory. Young persons are very apt to cherish vast and boundless desires as to outward things; and having not yet experienced the deceitfulness of the world, are apt to entertain excessive and extravagant hopes. The truth is, rich and poor, young and old, may here receive a lesson of the utmost moment.

Let me therefore intreat your attention, while I endeavour to open and improve this passage of the Holy Scriptures; beginning, at this time, with the first request, *Remove far from me vanity and lies.*

In discoursing on which, I will endeavour,

I. To explain the import of it, or shew at what it chiefly points, and to what it may be supposed to extend.

II.

II. Apply the subject for your instruction and direction.

I. I am to explain the import of the prophet's prayer, or shew at what it chiefly points, and to what it may be supposed to extend, in the petition, *Remove far from me vanity and lies.* The word *vanity*, especially when it is joined, as it is frequently in Scripture, with *lying*, or *lies*, is of a very large and comprehensive signification. The word in the original, translated *vanity*, properly signifies *lightness* or *emptiness*; and *lies* signify *falsehood*, in opposition to *truth*.

I imagine we shall have a clear conception, both of the meaning and force of this phrase, if we make the following remark: God himself is the great fountain of life and existence; the great I AM, as he emphatically styles himself to Moses; the *Original* and the *only reality*, if I may so speak. All other beings have only a dependent and precarious existence; so that the creation itself, though his own work, compared to him, is *vanity*. *Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity.* Therefore, in a particular manner, the word is often used to denote the folly of all idolatrous worship; or the giving the respect and honour to any thing else, which is due to God alone. *They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God, they have provoked me to anger with their vanities. Are there any among the vanities of the Gentiles that can cause rain; or can the heavens give showers, art thou not he, O Lord our God?*

Sometimes it is used to denote the *folly* or *unprofitableness* of any vice, and particularly of an ill-founded conceit of ourselves, as well as of all fraud and dissimulation, in word or action. So that this prayer for our souls, short as it appears to be, when considered in its full extent, will

will be found to contain a great variety of important matter.—This I shall endeavour to give you a brief account of, under the following particulars.

1. We are hereby taught to pray, that we may be preserved by divine grace, from all false and erroneous principles in religion; so as we may neither be deceived by them ourselves, nor any way instrumental in deceiving others. This, by what has been said of the use of the words in Scripture, appears to be implied in the request, and it is of more moment than some are willing to allow. The understanding being the leading faculty, an error *there* spreads its unhappy influence through the whole temper and life. Whereas, on the contrary, light in the mind produces fidelity and security in the conscience, and tenderness in the conversation. You may observe, that through the whole history of the Old Testament, idolatry, or a departure from the knowledge and worship of the true God, is the leading sin, and the fruitful source of every other vicious practice. We sometimes, indeed, seem to stand astonished at the excessive proneness of the ancient Jews to this sin. But we need only a little reflection to discover, that an evil heart of unbelief continues the same at bottom, and daily produces the like dangerous effects. How prone have men been in all ages to depart from the simplicity of the truth! In how many different shapes have they perverted it! One age, or one country, has been polluted by one error; and another by an opposite; impelled by the unstable and irregular fancies of men of corrupt minds. In the last age, the great theme of the carnal reasoner was, to attempt to expose the Scripture-doctrine of God's certain knowledge, and precise ordination of all events; and in this, fate and necessity, have become the strong hold of infidelity, and are embraced, or seem to be embraced, by every

every enemy of true religion without exception. Error, shifting its ground, indeed, is but natural; for lying vanities are innumerable; but the true God is the same *yesterday, to-day, and for ever.*

At this very time, how abounding and prevalent is infidelity, calling in question the most important and fundamental principles both of natural and revealed religion! And how properly is this described, by the expression in the text, *vanity and lies*; for it always takes its rise from the pride and vanity of the human heart? Sometimes a pride of understanding, which aspires to pass judgment on things far above its reach, and condemn things long before they are examined and understood: Sometimes also, from a pride of heart, or self-sufficiency, that is unable to endure the humbling and mortifying view given us in Scripture of our character and state. Oh how readily do men turn aside from the truth! With what greediness do they drink in the flattering but destructive poison! Need I point out to you the fatal effects of such principles taking place? It loosens the obligations to obedience, takes off the edge of the reproofs of conscience, and thus removing restraints, leaves men, in the emphatical language of the Holy Scripture, *to walk in the ways of their own hearts, and in the sight of their own eyes.*

But in this request, *remove far from me vanity and lies*, I would not have you confine your views to the most gross infidelity and avowed opposition to God. Pray also, that you may be preserved from error, or mistake of any kind; but especially such as have the greatest influence on the substance of religion.

A clear apprehension of the holy nature, and righteous government of God—the infinite evil of sin—the foundation of our peace in the blood of the atonement—

and the renewing of our natures by the Holy Ghost, seem to me absolutely necessary to true and undefiled religion. And they are the truths which particularly serve to exalt the Creator, and lay the creature in the dust. When, therefore, we consider how grateful to corrupt nature every thing is, that tends to foster pride, to create security, and set the mind at ease in the indulgence of sin; we must be sensible of how great importance it is, to pray for divine direction and divine preservation. Nothing is more dangerous to men than confidence and presumption; nothing more useful, in faith and practice, than humility and self-denial.

2. This prayer implies, a desire that we may be preserved from setting our affections on such objects as are but vain and unsatisfying, and will, in the end, disappoint our expectation. I take this to be not only a part, but a very important part of the Prophet's meaning. The world is the great source of temptation; the powerful and unhappy influence of which we may daily see; or rather, all of us daily and sensibly feel. What is it possesses the fancy, misleads the judgment, inflames the affections, consumes the time, and ruins the soul, but these present enjoyments, of which the wisest of men, after a full trial of them, hath left us their character *vanity of vanities*.

I am sensible that I have now entered upon a subject, which is far from being difficult to enlarge upon, and yet, perhaps, very difficult to treat with propriety, or in such a manner as to have the intended effect. There is nothing more easy than, in a bold declamatory way, to draw pictures of the vanity of human life. It hath been done by thousands, when, after all their broken schemes and disappointed views, they have just suffered shipwreck upon the coast of the enchanted land of hope. But from
such

such men we may expect to hear the language of despair, rather than of experience; and as it is too late for the instruction of the sufferers, so it very rarely has any effect in warning others to avoid the danger. What I would, therefore, willingly attempt is, to consider this matter in a sober scriptural light; if so be, that it may please God to carry conviction to our hearts, and make it truly useful, both to speaker and hearers.

Let me, therefore, my brethren, point out to you precisely, wherein the vanity of the world lieth. The world, in itself, is the workmanship of God, and every thing that is done in it, is by the ordination or permission of God. As such it is good, and may be used in suberviency to his honour, and our own peace. But through the corruption of our nature, the creature becomes the rival and competitor of the Creator for our hearts.—When we place our supreme happiness upon it, instead of making it a mean of leading us to God, then its inherent vanity immediately appears.—When men allow themselves in the indulgence of vicious pleasures, how justly may they be called *vanity and lies*? They are smiling and inviting to appearance, but how dreadful and destructive in their effects? *Whoredom and wine, and new wine taketh away the heart.* Those who refuse to be confined by the laws of piety and sobriety, *vainly* think they are walking at liberty, when they are bringing themselves into subjection to the severest and most inflexible of all masters. Read the just and striking description, by Solomon, of the effects of whoredom; and reflect on the innumerable calamities brought, in every age, on persons and families by unbridled lust. See also the effects of intemperance and excess—*Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging, and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.* And again: *The drunkard and glutton shall come to poverty.*

ty. Look not upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth its colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright; at last, it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.

Think on the unhappy consequences of dishonesty and fraud. *Bread of deceit is sweet to a man, but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel.*—You may also see, in innumerable passages of Scripture, that oppression of others, as it is a sin of the deepest dye, so it is often remarkably overtaken, and punished in the course of Providence, even in the present life. *Envy thou not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways; for the froward is abomination to the Lord, but his secret is with the righteous. The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked, but he blebseth the habitation of the just.*

But there is something more in this request, than being preserved from practices directly vicious; for the setting of our hearts upon worldly things, and making them our chief portion and delight, is certainly seeking after *vanity and lies*. They are far from affording that happiness and peace which we demand of them, and expect from them. *A little that a righteous man hath, is better than the riches of many wicked.* Can there be any thing more comfortable to experience, than that strong expression, *Thou preparest a table for me in the presence of mine enemies, thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over.* You may else find in the word of God, many warnings of the folly of those who travel in the path of ambition, and put their trust in man. *Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie. Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God.* But the most comprehensive remark of all, upon this subject, is, that human life itself is so exceedingly precarious, that it must write *vanity and emptiness*

on every thing, the possession and use of which is confined to the present state. *Behold thou hast made my days as an hand-breadth.* What a striking picture does our Lord draw of the vanity of human happiness, in that parable of the ground of the rich man, which brought forth plentifully? *And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?* And while this man is sedulously employed in making provision for a long and happy life, *God said unto him, Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee, then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?*

The whole of the preceding representation may be summed up in this excellent sentence of the wise man: *The wicked worketh a deceitful work; but to him that soweth righteously shall be a sure reward.*

Now, my brethren, need I add, how prone we are to be led astray, in a greater or less degree, by such *vanity and lies*?—I do not insist upon the many victims, which, in every age, have been seen to fall by the destructive hand of vice. How many have been ruined by lust, slain by intemperance, or beggared by dishonesty? But I intreat you particularly to observe, that when we set our affections immoderately upon any earthly object or enjoyment, or when they are not truly sanctified; how much they disappoint our expectation in possession, and what scenes of distress we prepare for ourselves by their removal.

3. This request, *Remove far from me vanity and lies*, implies, that God would graciously preserve us from deceiving ourselves, and thinking our character better, and our state safer than it really is. When we take a view of the state of the world, and the conduct of those who have not yet cast off all belief of eternity, and a judg-

ment to come, it is impossible to account for their security, but by a great degree of self-deceit. We may say of them with the prophet Isaiah, *He feedeth of ashes, a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?* And from the representation given by our Saviour, it is plain, that many shall continue in their mistake, and only be undeceived at the last day. *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.* How awful a reflection this! How dreadful a disappointment to discover our misery only when there is no more hope of escaping it! Is there not a possibility of this being the case with many of you, my brethren; and do you not tremble at the thought? I would not wish any, in general, to give way to a spirit of bondage, or slavish fear; but the best of the children of God have often discovered this holy jealousy of themselves. *Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me, then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.* And again: *Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*

This leads me naturally to add upon this subject, that we ought to pray for preservation from self-deceit, as to particular branches of our character and conduct, as well as our general state.—Many, even upon the whole, good men, are occasionally and insensibly brought, for a season, under the direction of sinful passions. They may be indulging themselves without suspicion, in what is, notwithstanding, really provoking to God, injurious or offensive to others, and, in the issue, hurtful to their own peace. They may be making an enjoyment, a talent, a relation,

an idol, when they think they are keeping within the bounds of duty. They may be indulging a sinful resentment, when they think they are promoting the glory of God. Many an excuse for neglecting commanded duty, from prudence or difficulty, satisfies ourselves, which will not stand in the day of trial. What reason for the Prophet's prayer in the sense just now assigned, *Remove far from me vanity and lies.*

4. In the next place, this request implies a desire to be preserved from pride and self-conceit, upon any subject. There is not any thing that affords a stronger evidence of our being unacquainted with ourselves and our own state, than that propensity to pride and vanity, which is so common to us all. It is thought by many, that pride was the sin of the angels, that cast them down to hell. It is plain, that pride was the main ingredient in the first sin of man. And perhaps it is a just and proper description of all sin as such, that it is a dethroning of God, and setting up self to be loved, honoured and served in his room. This sin is by no means confined to the worst of men, in whom it hath an absolute dominion; but retains and discovers an unhappy influence in the very best.—Every thing may be the fuel of pride; our persons, our performances, our relations, our possessions; nay, so pliable, and at the same time so preposterous is this disposition, that men are found sometimes proud of their very vices and defects. But how ill do pride and vanity suit such poor mortals as we are, who seem born but to die?—Who, after passing through a longer or shorter series of weaknesses, disappointments and troubles, must at last be laid in the silent grave, to moulder in the dust. We are dependent creatures, who have nothing, and can have nothing but what we receive from the unmerited favour of God. We are unwise and ignorant creatures, who

know nothing to the bottom, and therefore are liable to continual mistakes in our conduct. Those among us, who have the greatest comprehension of mind, and know most ; as it serves to shew the comparative ignorance of the bulk of mankind, so it serves to convince themselves how little they do know, and how little they can know after all, compared with what is to them unsearchable.

But, above all, we are sinful creatures, who have rendered ourselves, by our guilt, the just objects of Divine displeasure. Is there any who dares to plead exemption from this character? And do pride and vanity become those to whom they manifestly belong? Can any thing be more foolish than indulging such dispositions? There is a very just expression of one of the apocryphal writers: *Pride was not made for man, nor a high look for him that is born of a woman.* Indeed they are so evidently unsuitable to our state and circumstances, that one would think we should need no higher principle than our own reason and observation to keep us free from them. We do, however, need the most earnest and assiduous addresses to the throne of grace, to have all pride and vanity removed from us.—How hateful is pride to God! We are told, *he resisteth the proud.* On the contrary, no disposition is more amiable in his sight than humility. *He giveth grace to the humble.* And again: *To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word. For thus saith the high and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also, that is of a contrite and humble spirit; to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.*

It must, therefore, be the duty and interest of every good man, not only to resist pride and vanity, but to make

make it a part of his daily supplication to God, that he may effectually be delivered from both.

5. In the last place, this request implies a desire to be delivered from fraud and dissimulation of every kind. It is one of the glorious attributes of God, that he is a God of truth, who will not, and who cannot lie. He also requires of all his servants, and is delighted with truth in the inward parts. But there seems to be some difficulty in this part of the subject, more than in the others. Some will say, why pray to be delivered from fraud and dissimulation? This might be an exhortation to the sinner, but cannot be the prayer of the penitent. If they are sincere in their prayer, it seems impossible there can be any danger of fraud. Fraud implies deliberation and design; and though it may be concealed from others upon whom it is exercised, it can never be concealed from the person in whom it dwells, and by whom it is contrived. This is the very language of some reasoners, who infer from it, that though there are many other sins to which a man may be liable without knowing it, yet this can never be the case with dissimulation.

But, my brethren, if we consider how apt men are, upon a sudden temptation of fear or shame, or the prospect of some advantage to themselves, to depart from strict veracity, and even to justify to their own minds, some kinds and degrees of deceptions, we shall see the absolute necessity of making this a part of our prayer to God. Nay, perhaps I may go further and say, that we are as ready to deceive ourselves in this point as in any other.

Upon this important subject, there is one consideration to which I earnestly intreat your attention. Thorough sincerity, simplicity and truth, upon every subject, have, in the world, so much the appearance of weakness; and

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on the contrary, being able to manage and over-reach others, has so much the appearance of superior wisdom, that men are very liable to temptation from this quarter. It is to be lamented that our language itself, if I may so speak, has received a criminal taint; for in common discourse, the expression, *a plain well meaning-man*, is always apprehended to imply, together with sincerity, some degree of weakness; although, indeed, it is a character of all others the most noble. In recommendation of this character, let me observe, that in this, as in all the particulars mentioned above, *the wicked worketh a deceitful work; but he that walketh uprightly walketh surely*. Supposing a man to have the prudence and discretion not to speak without necessity; I affirm there is no end which a good man ought to aim at, which may not be more certainly, safely, and speedily obtained by the strictest and most inviolable sincerity, than by any acts of dissimulation whatever.

But after all, what signify any ends of present convenience, which dissimulation may pretend to answer, compared to the favour of God, which is forfeited by it? Hear what the Psalmist says: *Who shall abide in thy tabernacle, who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart.*—Let us, therefore, add this to the other views of the Prophet's comprehensive prayer, *Remove far from me vanity and lies.*

For the improvement of this part of the subject, observe,

1. You may learn from it how to attain, not only a justness and propriety, but a readiness and fulness in the duty of prayer.

Nothing is a greater hindrance, either to the fervency of our affections, or the force of our expressions in prayer, than

than when the object of our desires is confused and general. But when we perceive clearly what it is that is needful to us, and how much we do need it, this gives us, indeed, the *spirit of supplication*. Perhaps it is more necessary to attend to this circumstance; in what we ask for our souls than for our bodies. When we want any thing that relates to present conveniency, it is clearly understood, because it is sensibly felt.—There is no difficulty in crying for deliverance from poverty, sickness, reproach, or any other earthly suffering; nay, the difficulty here is not in exciting our desires, but in moderating them; not in producing fervor, but in promoting submission: But in what relates to our souls, because many or most temptations are agreeable to the flesh, we foresee danger less perfectly, and even feel it less sensibly; therefore, a close and deliberate attention to our situation and trials, as opened in the preceding discourse, is of the utmost moment, *both to carry us to the throne of grace, and to direct our spirit when we are there.*

2. What hath been said will serve to excite us to habitual watchfulness, and to direct our daily conversation. The same things that are the subjects of prayer, are also the objects of diligence.—Prayer and diligence are joined by our Saviour, and ought never to be separated by his people.—Prayer without watchfulness is not sincere, and watchfulness without prayer will not be successful. The same views of sin and duty, of the strength and frequency of temptation, and the weakness of the tempted, lead equally to both. Let me beseech you then, to walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise. Maintain an habitual diffidence of yourselves: Attend to the various dangers to which you are exposed. Watchfulness of itself will save you from many temptations, and will give you an inward warrant, and humble confidence, to ask of God support

support under, and deliverance from, such as it is impossible to avoid.

3. In the last place, since every thing comprehended in the petition in the text, is viewed in the light of falsehood and deceit, suffer me, in the most earnest manner, to recommend to my hearers, and particularly to all the young persons under my care, *an invariable adherence to truth, and the most undisguised simplicity and sincerity in the whole of their conversation and carriage.* I do not know where to begin or end in speaking of the excellency and beauty of sincerity, or the baseness of falsehood. Sincerity is amiable, honourable and profitable. It is the most shining part of a commendable character, and the most winning apology for any miscarriage or unadvised action. There is scarcely any action in itself so bad, as what is implied in the hardened front of him who covers the truth with a lie: Besides, it is always a sign of long practice in wickedness. Any man may be seduced or surprised into a fault, but none but the habitual villain can deny it with steady calmness and obstinacy. In this respect, we unhappily find some who are young offenders but old sinners.

It is not in religion only, but even among worldly men, that lying is counted the utmost pitch of baseness; and to be called a liar, *the most unsupportable reproach.* No wonder, indeed, for it is the very essence of cowardice to dare to do a thing which you have not courage to avow. The very worst of sinners are sensible of it themselves, for they deeply resent the imputation of it; and, if I do not mistake, have never yet arrived at the absurdity of defending it. There is scarcely any other crime, but some are profligate enough to boast of it; but I do not remember ever to have heard of any who made his boast, *that he was a liar.* To crown all, lying is the most wretched

wretched folly. Justly does Solomon say, *A lying tongue is but for a moment.* It is easily discovered. Truth is a firm consistent thing, every part of which agrees with, and strongly supports another. But lies are not only repugnant to truth, but repugnant to each other; and commonly the means, like a treacherous thief, of the detection of the whole. Let me, therefore, once more recommend to every one of you, the noble character of sincerity.—Endeavour to establish your credit in this respect so entirely, that every word you speak may be beyond the imputation of deceit; so that enemies may themselves be sensible, that though you should abuse them, you will never deceive them.

SER.

S E R M O N XXI.

SEEKING A COMPETENCY IN THE WIS- DOM OF PROVIDENCE.

BY

JOHN WITHERSPOON, D.D. L.L.D.

Col. N. C. P.

PROV. xxx. 8.

*Give me neither poverty, nor riches; feed me with food
convenient for me.*

I PROCEED now to consider the second branch of the Prophet's prayer, which regard his outward condition, or circumstances in the present world. On this subject he expresses himself thus: *Give me neither poverty nor riches.*

Do not think, my brethren, that this is a subject of little importance, or that it is unconnected with the spiritual life. On the contrary, there are few things of more moment, than to have our desires of temporal blessings limited and directed in a proper manner. Not only is
worldly

worldly mindedness the everlasting ruin of those who are entirely under its dominion, but even good men are liable to many temptations from the same quarter. They may hurt their own peace, give offence to others, or lessen their usefulness by a sinful excess in their attachment to the world, or by a criminal negligence in not giving a prudent and proper attention to it. Be not surprised that I have mentioned the *last* of these as well as the *first*, for the Prophet prays for deliverance from the temptation arising from both extremes. Idleness and sloth are as contrary to true religion, as either avarice or ambition; and the habit, when once taken, is perhaps more difficult to remove.

In order to treat this subject with the greater distinctness, I shall, *first*, shew you what we may learn in general from this prayer, *secondly*, explain the particular object of the Prophet's desire; and, in the *last place*, make applications of what may be said, by recommending it to your choice.

I. In the first place, then, we may learn in general from this request, that it is lawful to pray for temporal blessings. It is not unworthy of a Christian, whose conversation is in heaven, to ask of God what is necessary to his support and preservation in the present life. If I were to mention all the examples of this in scripture, I should transcribe a great part of the Bible. Though inferior in their nature and value to spiritual blessings, they are necessary in their place; and it is upon this footing they are expressly put by our Saviour. *Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of these things.* They are needful to the prolonging of our natural life till we finish our work, and are fitted for our reward. Therefore, though miracles are a kind of suspension of the laws of nature,
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and the ordinary course of providence; yet we find God sometimes working a miracle to supply the wants of his servants. It had been no more difficult for God to have kept Elijah from hungering, than to have made the eagles fetch him provision; or to have made, as in another case, a barrel of meal, or a cruise of oil, the lasting and sufficient support of a whole family. But he chooseth rather to supply the wants of his people, than cause them to cease, that he may keep their dependence constantly in their view, and that a sense of their necessities may oblige them to have continual recourse to him for relief.

Again, we may here learn, that God is the real and proper giver of every temporal, as well as of every spiritual blessing. A sentiment this, of the utmost consequence, to be engraven upon the heart. We have here an instance out of many, in which truths known and confessed by all, have notwithstanding little hold upon the mind. How few are truly sensible of their continual obligations to the God of life? Consider, I beseech you, that whatever you possess of any kind, it is the gift of God. He holdeth your soul in life, and guards you by his Providence in your going out and in your coming in. He covereth your table and filleth your cup. Have you riches? It is by the blessing of the God of heaven.—*The blessing of the Lord, saith the Psalmist, it maketh rich. But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God, for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth.* Have you credit and reputation? It is God that hideth you from the stripes of tongues. *Thou shalt be hid from the scourge of the tongue, neither shalt thou be afraid of destruction when it cometh.* Have you friends? It is he that giveth you favour in their sight: Have you talents and parts? It is

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the *inspiration of the Almighty* that giveth thee understanding.

H. Let us now explain the particular tenor of this petition, and point out the object of the Prophet's desire: *Give me neither poverty nor riches.* It is plain we are not to suppose the Prophet, in any degree, refusing submission to the will of God, by his thus making choice of a particular state of life.—Doubtless he resolved to be at God's disposal, and believed that he was able to sanctify to him a state of the highest prosperity, or of the deepest adversity. It was no distrust on God, but self-denial and diffidence of his own strength that suggested this prayer. Therefore, in adjusting his desires and expectations, he pitches upon that state that appeared to him liable to the fewest snares. Thus our blessed Saviour, though it is his will that we should fear no enemy when going out in Divine strength, yet teaches us to pray, *Lead us not into temptation.*

Poverty and riches are here mentioned as the two extremes; in neither of which we should wish to be placed, but in a safer middle between the two, so as, if it please God, we may neither be urged by pressing necessity, nor overloaded with such abundance, as we may be in danger of abusing.

But perhaps some will say, Where is the middle? How shall we be able to determine what we ought to desire, since there is so immense a distance, and so many intermediate degrees, between the extremity of want and the countless treasures of the wealthy?

But, my brethren, if we do not hearken to the illusive calls of ambition, avarice and lust, it is by no means difficult to apprehend the meaning of the Prophet, and ap-

ply it to persons of every rank. Regard, no doubt, is to be had to the various stations in which God hath thought fit to place us. This difference of station requires supplies of the conveniencies of life, suited to the part we are bound to act. That manner of life which would be decent and liberal in one station, would be reckoned mean and sordid in another. Therefore what would be plenty and fulness to persons in inferior stations, would be extreme poverty to persons placed and called to act in higher and more exalted spheres. But after we have taken in the consideration of every difference that may happen on this score, there is something in the prayer that belongs in common to *persons of all stations*, namely, that we should be modest in our desires after temporal good things, and take care not to ask only to gratify a sensual inclination, but for what is really necessary or useful to us. The last is reasonable and allowable, the other is unreasonable, and justly condemned by the Apostle James. *Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.*

But the first part of this request is explained by the last, contained in the words, *feed me with food convenient for me*. That we may be able to enter into the true spirit of this petition, I shall just compare it with some other scriptural forms of prayer on the same subject, and then endeavour to point out what I take to be the chief instruction intended to be conveyed to us by it.

As to the scripture forms of prayer for temporal provision, the precedence is undoubtedly due to that excellent form left us by our Saviour, in which we find this petition, *Give us this day our daily bread*. You may next attend to the prayer put up by Jacob in ancient times: *And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and*

and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then shall the Lord be my God. It is more than probable, that the Apostle Paul alludes to Jacob's expression, in his excellent advice to all Christians. *But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out; and having food and raiment, let us be therewith contents. But they that will be rich, fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition;—for the love of money is the root of all evil, which, while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*

It is obvious to remark, that all these prayers and this apostolic counsel run in the same strain. They all begin and are founded upon a regard to God, and a mind rightly disposed towards him: *If the Lord, says Jacob, will be with me.—Remove, says Agur in my text, far from me vanity and lies.* Our Saviour begins his prayer with petitions for the glory of God, with which the happiness of our souls is inseparably connected; and the Apostle maintains *godliness* as the great source of contentment with our portion in this life.

We may further observe, that there is the same method observed in all these prayers. The expressions vary a little, but the request is the same. Jacob wishes for the divine protection, with food to eat, and raiment to put on. Agur for food convenient for him; and in the Lord's prayer, we ask for our daily bread. There is no specifying of any particulars,—no mention made of this or the other quantity of provision. Their desires are summed up in this general request, and the quantity and quality

wholly referred to the good pleasure of God. It is certain that God hath sometimes granted to his own people riches in great abundance; and, at the same time, has given his blessing to enjoy them, and honoured the possessors, by enabling them to glorify him in the use and application of them. But the direct desire of riches, I do not think, hath any warrant from precept or example in his word; and when they are bestowed as a blessing, and not a curse, it is commonly on those who by their superior concern about the better part, shew that they will put them to their proper use, as in the case of Solomon, recorded in the first book of Kings. *In Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, Ask what I shall give thee? And he said, Give thy servant an understanding heart. And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing. And God said, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life, neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies, but hast asked for thyself understanding, to discern judgment: Behold I have done according to thy words: Lo! I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart, so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches and honour.*

Now this I take to be the main instruction intended to be given us with respect to our prayers for temporal mercies, that we should not pretend to set bounds to God, but leave the measure of them to his determination.

For further explaining this truth, and at the same time, recommending it to your regard, be pleased to attend to the following observations.

1. Consider that God, infinitely wise, as well as gracious, is certainly the best judge of what is most fit and convenient

convenient for us. We know so little of ourselves, that we really know not how we should behave, if placed in particular circumstances, until we are tried. The world has actually seen many examples of those who were loud in their accusations of others, behaving worse when placed in the same stations. And, indeed, I should naturally expect, that an impatient, envious, disobedient subject would, if raised to power, be a cruel, insolent, unjust oppressor; that a petulant, peevish, obstinate servant would make a capricious, severe, unreasonable master.

If we were to carve out our own lot, and to have all our own desires gratified, there is great reason to presume we would throw ourselves into the most disagreeable circumstances with regard to our souls, and probably consult but ill for our peace and comfort in this world.

Let me put a few questions to every one that secretly murmurs at his state. Are you sure, that if you were advanced to a place of power and trust, you would be able to carry with prudence, resolution and integrity? Are you sure, that if you were supplied with riches in great abundance, you would not allow yourselves to wander in pleasure, or to swell in pride? Are you sure, that if you were raised to high rank, surrounded by flatterers, and worshipped by servants, you would, in that standing, behave with humility and condescension; or, that pressed on all hands by business, company, or amusements, *you would still religiously save your time for converse with God?*

A life of piety in an exalted station, is a continual conflict with the strongest opposition. What says experience upon this subject? Solomon did not wholly, and to the end, resist the temptation of riches and dominion. In the whole compass of history, sacred and profane, I do not

remember any example of a man's behaving better in point of morals, in a prosperous than in an afflicted state, excepting one that hath this appearance, viz. Cicero, the Roman orator. His conduct in prosperity was full of dignity, and seemed wholly directed to the public good; whereas in adversity, it was to the last degree mean and abject,—But probably the reason of this was, that pride, or rather vanity, was his ruling passion, and the great motive to his illustrious actions; and when he fell into adversity, this disposition had no scope for its exercise.

Christians, the Lord knoweth our frame, and is well acquainted with what we are able to bear, and consequently what state of life will be upon the whole most convenient for us. It is, therefore, our interest, as well as duty, to refer ourselves entirely to him, and leave him to chuse for us. This is not only the doctrine of Scripture, but so agreeable to reason and good sense, that it has been acknowledged by several of the Heathen philosophers, who have expressed themselves in terms perfectly similar to those of the inspired writings. The prayer which Socrates taught his pupil Alcibiades, is very remarkable; that he should beseech the Supreme God to give him what was good for him, though he should not ask it, and to withhold from him whatever would be hurtful, though he should be so foolish as to pray for it.

2. As God is certainly the best judge of what is good for us, so resignation to him is a most acceptable expression, both of our worship and obedience. Single duties are particular acts; resignation is the very *habit* of obedience. The wisdom and goodness of God are acknowledged in the most authentic manner, when his holy and sovereign Providence is humbly submitted to, and cordially approved. Every impatient complaint is an impeachment of Providence;

Providence ; every irregular desire is an act of rebellion against God. Therefore a submissive temper must be highly pleasing to God, and is the way to glorify him in the most unexceptionable manner. The rather indeed, as it is impossible to attain this temper, but by sincerely laying hold of the covenant of peace, which is ordered in all things and sure. This teaches us the grounds of submission. This procures for us the grace of submission. This stains the pride of all human glory. This changes the nature of our possessions to us, and us to them. This spiritualizes a worldly mind, and makes us know, in our own experience, that all the paths of the Lord to his own people are mercy and peace.

3. Such a temper of mind will greatly contribute to our own inward peace. It will be an effectual preservative from all unrighteous courses, and unlawful or even dishonourable means of increasing our worldly substance, and consequently save us from the troubles or dangers to which men expose themselves by such practices. It will preserve us from perplexing anxiety, and many uneasy fears for futurity. It will bring us the near and sure way to the greatest of all earthly blessings,—a contented mind.

Such will be the sweet and delightful effects of depending upon God, and leaving it to him to furnish our supplies as he sees most convenient for us. Whoever can pray with the Prophet, *Give me neither poverty nor riches, feed me with food convenient for me*, may be fully assured, that his desire shall be gratified, as it is perfectly agreeable to the will of God.

I conclude with reading to you our Saviour's exhortation on this subject. *Therefore, I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink ; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not*

the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not ye much better than they? But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.

SER.

S E R M O N XXII.

THE DANGER OF PROSPERITY.

B Y

JOHN WITHERSPOON, D.D. LL.D.

Col. N. C. P.

Prov. xxx. 9.

Left I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? Or, left I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.

I PROCEED now to consider the arguments by which the Prophet enforces his wise and well-conceived prayer. These, in connection with the two branches of the prayer, stand thus: *Give me not riches, left I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? And give me not poverty, left I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.* If Agur's prayer is conceived in the most modest and humble terms, the reasons with which he supports it are every way becoming a truly wise and good man. You see in them a prevailing concern for the ho-

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nour and glory of God, and his own preservation in the paths of piety and virtue. You see in them a humble sense of his own weakness, and the danger of temptation; he, therefore, desires to be placed in such a state of life as will expose him to the fewest trials. An excellent disposition this, and highly worthy of our imitation. How happy would it be for us all, if a desire to please God and preserve our integrity, lay always nearest our hearts, and had a constant and commanding influence on every step we took in our journey through life.

Neither riches nor poverty are bad in themselves. Neither of them is any recommendation or hindrance to the favour of God, who is no respecter of persons. There are good and bad in all ranks. Men may be rich, and yet pious, or poor, yet strictly just and honest. It is, I confess, often done, yet it is highly criminal to look upon all that are rich in this world as profane; and it would be equally so to look upon all that are poor as destitute of integrity. Yet it is undeniable, that, from the corruption of the human heart, these two extremes do often become strong temptations to the particular sins mentioned in the text; which we shall now consider separately, in the order in which they lie in the passage before us.

Give me not riches, lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord?

As to the fact, that riches do often lead to profanity and contempt of God, experience, and the state of the world, prove it in a manner too plain to be denied. We not only see that those, who are born and educated from their infancy in the higher ranks of life, are most prone to neglect the duties of religion; but those who, from a low or mean condition, are remarkably raised in the course of Providence, do often change their temper with their state, and show the unhappy influence of riches in

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leading them to a forgetfulness of God. Are there not some who were regularly in God's house when they but barely subsisted, who have not time for it now, when they are busy and wealthy? Are there not some families, where the worship of God was constant and regular in early life, while they were undistinguished, and now it is no more to be heard in their sumptuous palaces and elegant apartments? Shall I say, that any worm of the earth is become too considerable to fall down before the omnipotent JEHOVAH?

I may add, as being of great importance in the present subject, that such changes do often take place gradually and insensibly, very much contrary to men's own expectation; so that we really do not know ourselves, nor can we determine before trial, how far we would resist or yield to the force of temptation. The prophet Elisha foretold to Hazael the cruelties he would be guilty of when raised to an higher station; to which he replied with disdain and abhorrence, *What, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?* And Elisha answered, *the Lord hath shewed me that thou shalt be king over Syria.* The conduct of the children of Israel in their prosperity is but an emblem of the general conduct of the children of men. *But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked. Thou art waxed fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness: Then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation.*

What hath been said might be sufficient to shew the propriety of the Prophet's prayer; for if such hath been often, or generally, the influence of worldly greatness upon other men, why should any be so confident as to presume it would be otherwise with themselves? But perhaps it may afford matter of useful instruction to enquire a little further into the subject, to trace the causes of this effect, and shew how, and why riches become an inducement

inducement to irreligion and profaneness, for this will best enable us to apply the remedy. When I speak of examining the causes of this effect, I confess that no reason can be given for it, but what reflects great dishonour upon human nature in its present state. Were we to judge of the matter by the dictates of sound reason, we should naturally expect to find it directly contrary. God is the author of every blessing which men possess, and his gifts should lead us to gratitude and acknowledgment. It seems natural then to suppose, that those who are most highly favoured in the course of Providence, should discover the greatest sense of obligation, and be ready to make every dutiful return. One would think, that though the poor should be impatient, surely the rich will be content and thankful. Is not this reasonable? Had any of you bestowed many favours upon others, would you not expect that their gratitude should bear some proportion to the number and value of benefits received? Had any of them been remarkably distinguished from the rest, would you not expect from them the most inviolable fidelity and attachment? Strange, that our conduct should be so directly opposite in the returns we make for the goodness of our Maker! That those who are distinguished from others by the largest possessions, and the greatest fulness of all temporal mercies, should be the most prone to wickedness of all sorts; but especially, that they should be peculiarly inclined to forgetfulness and contempt of God. Yet so it is in truth. But however dishonourable it is to human nature, let us search into it a little, and perhaps we may discover the cause of impiety in persons in affluent circumstances, and the danger the Prophet would avoid, by attending to the following observations:

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1. An easy and affluent fortune affords the means, not only of pampering our bodies, but of gratifying all our lusts and appetites. They are as strong probably in persons of inferior stations; but Providence has rendered the gratification more difficult, and in some cases impossible. Many work through necessity, who would be as idle and slothful as any, but for the fear of want. These will be the first and readiest to reproach the rich, and call them idle drones, who revel in that abundance for which they never toiled; and to put to their own credit that which is wholly owing to the restraints under which they are laid. Many are generally sober, because they cannot afford the charges of intemperance, who want nothing but the means, to riot in the most brutal sensuality. But to persons of great wealth, the objects of desire are always placed in full view, and are evidently within their reach; so that the temptation has uncommon force, and few are able entirely to resist it.

2. The indulgence of pleasure infeasibly induces a habit, and leads men to place their happiness in such enjoyments. Habit, you know, is very powerful, and while the habit acquires strength, the power of resistance is gradually weakened. These gratifications consume so much time, that there is little left to reflect upon God, and our relation to him. I reckon it none of the least temptations to persons of high rank, that not only their self-indulgence, but the attendance and obsequiousness of others so engrosses their attention, and wastes their time, that they have few opportunities of calm and sober reflection; or, at least, can easily escape from it, and take refuge in company and amusement. Add to this, that a great variety of sensible objects and enjoyments render the mind, not only less attentive to things of a spiritual nature, but indeed, less able to understand them.

3. Observe

3. Observe further, that when the better part is thus neglected, and no care taken of the cultivation of the mind, every vice will spring and shoot up in the soul, as briars and thorns do upon uncultivated ground. Sin, my brethren, is natural to us; it is the produce of the soil; if it is not destroyed, it will not die; if it is but neglected, it will thrive. Now, whenever persons fall under the power of vice, they begin first to excuse, and then to vindicate it. Those who are under the government of lust, soon find it would be their interest that there was no such thing as religion and virtue. Whatever we wish, we are easily led to believe to be true. Loose and atheistical principles then find a ready admittance, and are swallowed down greedily. This is a short sketch of the steps by which people in affluent and easy circumstances are often led to deny God, and to say, *What is the Almighty that we should serve him, and what profit should we have if we pray unto him?*—Loose principles are, at first, more frequently the effect, than the cause of loose practices; but when once they have taken deep root, and obtained full dominion in the heart, they have a dreadful and fatal influence on the devoted victim.

But, my brethren, I find a strong inclination to make another remark, though perhaps it may be thought of too refined and abstract a nature. It is, that the danger of affluence in leading to contempt of God, arises from the nature of all sin as such. The original and first sin of man was plainly affecting independence. They desired and expected to be as gods, knowing good and evil. And still sin properly consists in withdrawing our allegiance from, and throwing off our dependence upon God, and giving, as it were, that esteem, love and service to ourselves, in one shape or another, that is due only to him. Now observe, that affluence nourishes this mistake, and suffering

suffering kills it. The more every thing abounds with us, the more our will is submitted to, and our inclinations gratified on every subject; the more we look upon ourselves as independent, and forget our obligations to God. Whereas, on the other hand, disappointments and calamities open our blind eyes, and make us remember what we are. Was not the proud monarch of Babylon inspired with this delusive sense of independence, when he expressed himself thus: *At the end of twelve months he walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon. The king spake and said, Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?* But mark the more powerful word of the King of Kings. *While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken, the kingdom is departed from thee!* That this is the proper source of worldly greatness, may be seen in the temper such persons usually acquire and settle in, which is pride, insolence, and contempt of others. Nay, it appears still more clearly in some few instances, in which the intoxication comes to its height, and the poor deluded mortal literally aspired to be considered and treated as God. It may seem incredible, but we have the most authentic evidence that history can afford, that some men have demanded and received divine worship. This was the case, not only with Alexander the Great, who was really an illustrious prince, but with some of the later Roman emperors, who were the meanest and basest of all men. No wonder, then, that prosperity makes men neglect God, when it prompts them to sit down upon his throne, and rob him of the service of his other subjects.

Before I proceed to the other part of the Prophet's argument,

gument, suffer me to make a few remarks for the improvement of what has been already said. And,

1. See hence the great malignity and deceitfulness of sin. It hardly appears more strongly from any circumstance than that which has been the subject of this discourse, viz. that the gifts of God, in the course of his Providence, are so far from exciting our gratitude, in proportion to their number and value, that, on the contrary, those who *receive most* are usually *most profane*. They make his favours instruments of rebellion against him, and return contempt for his indulgence, and hatred for his love.

Let us not take occasion from this to gratify our own envy, by particular or personal reproach against those who are great, or have become rich amongst themselves; but let us act a far wiser and juster part, and be humbled for the sinfulness of our nature, and warned of the deceitfulness of sin. We may feel the seeds of this disposition in us all. You find the wise man charging a similar ingratitude upon man in general. *Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.* And do you not observe every day, nay, has it not turned into a proverb, that we think light of our mercies, spiritual and temporal, when they are common and abundant? And what is the true and proper interpretation of this, but that the greater God's goodness is to us, commonly the less is our gratitude to him?

2. Let me beseech you to make a wise improvement of the advantages you enjoy over one another. Let them excite in you a holy emulation to testify your sense of superior blessings, by superior piety and usefulness. Do you excel others in any respect? Are you successful in trade? Have you risen to reputation? Are you exalted
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to offices of dignity? Are you endowed with capacity of mind? Can you remember the time when those were your equals who are now your inferiors? Do not look with insolence upon others, making odious, and perhaps unjust comparisons. Do not swell in pride and self-complacency, as if by your own power you had made yourselves to differ, but rather look the other way to God, who is the maker both of rich and poor, and pray that your thankfulness and duty to him may exceed that of the poor man, as much as his liberality to you exceeds what he has thought proper to bestow upon him. This affords me an opportunity of relating a little piece of private history, that happened in Great Britain, and appears to me very worthy of remembrance, and very conducive to the ends of edification.

A gentleman of very considerable fortune, but a stranger to either personal or family religion, one evening took a solitary walk through a part of his own grounds. He happened to come near to a mean hut, where a poor man with a numerous family lived, who earned their bread by daily labour. He heard a voice pretty loud and continued. Not knowing what it was, curiosity prompted him to listen. The man, who was piously disposed, happened to be at prayer with his family. So soon as he could distinguish the words, he heard him giving thanks with great affection to God, for the goodness of his Providence, in giving them food to eat, and raiment to put on, and in supplying them with what was necessary and comfortable in the present life. He was immediately, no doubt, by Divine power, struck with astonishment and confusion, and said to himself, Does this poor man, who has nothing but the meanest fare, and that purchased by severe labour, give thanks to God for his goodness to himself and family, and I, who enjoy ease and honour,

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and

and every thing that is grateful and desirable, have hardly ever bent my knee, or made any acknowledgment to my Maker and Preserver. It pleased God, that this providential occurrence proved the mean of bringing him to a real and lasting sense of God and religion.

Let all persons in health, quiet and plentiful circumstances, learn from the preceding discourse, what it is they ought clearly to guard against.—Pride, security, forgetfulness of God, are peculiarly incident to that state. *In this*, saith the Lord to Jerusalem, *was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her, and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy.* A serious reflection on the obligation such lie under to God for what they have received in their continued dependence upon him, and the instability of all earthly things, would save them from the hurtful influence of worldly prosperity. To enforce this, I shall only read the apostolic charge to Timothy. *Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us all things richly to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.*

S E R M O N XXIII.

THE DANGER OF ADVERSITY.

BY

JOHN WITHERSPOON, D.D. LL.D.

Col. N. C. P.

PROVERBS xxx. 9.

Lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.

I PROCEED now to consider the argument by which the Prophet urges the second branch of his request, which, in connexion, runs thus—*Give me not poverty, lest I be poor and steal.* Having not only explained the general principle that runs through the whole of this subject, but also very particularly pointed out the dangers attending an opulent and wealthy state; I shall endeavour to do the same thing with respect to a state of poverty and straitness. While I attempt this, I am sincerely sorry that there is so much propriety in the subject, and that it is so well suited to the circumstances of the inhabitants of this place. You see the Prophet considers the great and

general temptation to which the poor are exposed to be dishonest, by using fraudulent means of relieving their wants, or bettering their condition. You see also, he considers this temptation in its progress, not only inclining them to act unjustly, but sometimes proceeding to the terrible degree of concealing or supporting the fraud by falsehood, and perhaps at last by perjury or false swearing; *lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.*

Let us first consider a little the matter of fact, as it appears in experience, and then a few of its principal causes.

As to the first of these, shall I be afraid to affirm, that extreme poverty often inclines persons to dishonesty and fraud? Will it be thought harsh and severe to those already sufficiently depressed? As I would not seem to stand in this place and flatter the pride of the greatest, and most eminent of my fellow-sinners, so neither will I dissemble the truth from a false compassion for the poor. This would indeed be doing them the greatest possible injury; It would be treating them, from mistaken tenderness, as the rich are often treated from the fear or partiality of those who are about them; fostering their self-deceit, and not suffering them to hear the most salutary truths, because they are not pleasing to the flesh.

It is undoubtedly matter of experience, that great poverty makes many take unjust and unwarrantable methods of procuring relief. Not only so, but they seem often disposed to justify and defend them, as if they had a title to rectify what they think mistakes of Providence, in the distribution of worldly possessions. This, in the event, receives great encouragement from some who seem to have imbibed a general false principle, and act upon it, both in their own conduct, and in their judgment

ment of others. In the division of controversy, or dividing disputed property, when one party is, or is supposed to be rich, and in easy circumstances, and the other poor, and in a mean condition, they think, that instead of acting according to strict justice, the advantage should always be made to fall to the poorer side. This conduct is considered by some, not only as lawful, but as laudable. It is, however, a false principle, and is condemned in Scripture, which says, *Neither shalt thou countenance a poor man in his cause.* It may be thought, perhaps, that the other is the more common and dangerous partiality, and probably it is so; yet this also is blameworthy, and when followed out, as I am afraid it too often is, must involve numbers unawares in the guilt of stealing; for when they have once laid down this rule, that the poor have some claim upon the rich, they are ready to apply it to their own case, and extend it very far. But in all matters of property, or right and wrong, whether a person is rich or poor, ought to be utterly out of the question; the only thing to be considered is, what is just and lawful. The rich, are, indeed, in point of conscience, bound to assist the poor; but this must be their own act; no person can take the smallest part of their property without their consent, but he is guilty of an act of injustice, and violation of the law of God. No person has a right to make them generous and charitable against their wills, or to exercise their own generosity and charity at their expence. This must be left to the Supreme Judge at the last day, who will say to them, *I was a stranger and ye took me not in, naked and ye clothed me not, sick and in prison and ye visited me not.* But what will give us the most distinct view of the influence of poverty as a temptation, is the too frequent conduct of those who are reduced from what was once their state to poverty or debt,

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debt, by misfortune or extravagance, or mismanagement of their affairs. The temptation of poverty is not by far so great to those in the meanest ranks of life, whose incomes, though small, is not very disproportionate to what hath always been their condition, as to those who are reduced from a higher to a lower state. The few who, in such a situation, preserve their integrity inviolated, and their sincerity of speech unsuspected, deserve the highest honour. Nay, I am persuaded that, bad as the world is, every person in reduced circumstances would meet with compassion and assistance, if all about him were sensible that he had neither lost his substance by neglect, nor wasted it by riot, nor concealed it by fraud. But though we cannot help ascribing some measure of what is laid to the charge of persons in this unhappy state, to the rage and resentment of those who have suffered by them; yet, alas! there is too great reason to affirm, that they are too often guilty of prevarication and fraud, the sins mentioned in the text.

I will dwell no longer upon the fact, but will consider a little the reasons of it, which will directly serve to promote the design of this discourse, by exciting men to concern and solicitude, as well as pointing out the proper means of avoiding the temptation. The general reason of this, to be sure, is obvious to every body, that persons in poverty, being strongly solicited by the appetites common to all men, and not having of their own wherewith to gratify their desires, are tempted to lay hold of the property of others. They grudge to see that others have the enjoyments from which they are debarred; and since they cannot have them in a lawful, make bold to seize them in an unlawful way. But this I do not insist on, that I may mention one or two particular reasons, which will suggest suitable exhortations to duty.

1. The first I shall mention, is ignorance. This is peculiarly

culiarly applicable to those in the lowest ranks of life. Through poverty they are not so well instructed, as they ought to be, in the principles of religion, and the great rules of duty. An ignorant state is almost always a state of security. Their consciences are less tender, and they are less sensible of the great evil of prevarication and fraud. I am obliged, in fidelity, to say, that in the private inspection of my charge, though I have found some instances both of poverty and sickness borne with the most pious resignation; there are also some whose condition might move the hardest heart, living in the most fordid poverty, grossly ignorant, and, at the same time, so dispirited, so slothful, or so proud, that they will do little to obtain knowledge for themselves, or communicate it to their children. Many will not attend upon the public means of instruction, because they cannot appear in such a decent garb as they could wish; and for the same reason they keep their children from them, till they contract such habits of idleness and vice, that they come out into the world without principle, obstinate and untractable. Is not the duty here very plain? All such should exert themselves to obtain the knowledge of the things which belong to their peace. They should neither be unwilling nor ashamed to make application for supply; and even the coarsest raiment should not hinder them from appearing in the house of God. Thus they will find acceptance with him, if they worship him in the beauty of holiness, preferable to those who are clothed in purple and fine linen, and their hearts are after their covetousness.

2. Another great reason why poverty becomes a temptation to fraud is, that they are introduced to it insensibly, and led on by degrees. The sin steals upon them by little and little. People involved in their circumstances, to get rid of importunity and solicitation, make promises,

more of what they hope or wish, than of what they are able to do. Necessity serves as an excuse for their failing to their own minds, and thus they are gradually brought into a breach of sincerity, and proceed from lower to higher degrees of falsehood. Little arts of evasion are first made use of, and doubtful practices are entered upon. One sin seems necessary to strengthen or conceal another, till at last the grossest fraud, and sometimes perjury itself, closes the unhappy scene. I have read an excellent observation, that there is hardly such a thing as a single sin; they are always to be found in clusters. I am sure, this holds in a particular manner as to sins of injustice. They are so interwoven and connected together, that you cannot receive any one without being obliged to admit the rest. This is one great branch of the deceitfulness of sin in general; with a view to which the apostle says, *But exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*

3. I only mention one other reason of poverty being a temptation to fraud, viz. that in time it destroys the sense of shame. I am not ignorant, that a sense of shame, which is nothing else but a fear of the censure of others, neither is, nor ought to be the main principle of a good man's actions. But as there is no other principle at all in many, so it is a good assistant and corroborative, when justly directed: but now, through the corrupt maxims of the world, poverty is so much the object of contempt, and those who are in this state, meet every day with so many marks of neglect from all, that before their condition is known, they will do almost any thing to conceal it, and after it is known, they become in time so destitute of shame, that they are under no further restraint.

From this particular branch of the subject, let me put you in mind,

1. What reason many have to be thankful to the God of life, who hath given them their daily provision, if not in all abundance of immense riches, yet in fulness and sufficiency. An humble, thankful disposition is not only your duty, in return for the Divine bounty, but is itself the richest and sweetest ingredient in all temporal mercies. It is that, indeed, which makes them mercies. Envious persons do not taste what they have, their evil eye being fixed on what they cannot obtain. Things in this respect are just what they seem to be. Our comforts are as we are enabled to relish them. The same possessions which are despised by the impatient or ambitious, are a treasure and abundance to the humble and grateful.

2. If poverty is a temptation, it ought to be an argument to all to avoid it, or seek deliverance from it by lawful means. Apply yourselves with steadiness and perseverance to the duties of your calling, that you may provide things honest in the sight of all men. It is a duty of the land, and of the Gospel; and it hath this promise in general annexed to it, that *the hand of the diligent maketh rich*. Read, I beseech you, that vast treasure of useful instruction, the book of Proverbs, where you will meet with many excellent counsels and wise observations upon this subject. Of these I shall mention at present but two passages, selected both for the soundness of the instruction, and the beauty of the illustration. *Go to the ant, thou sluggard, consider her ways and be wise; which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? When wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man.* And again: *I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; and lo it was all grown over with thorns,*
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and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone-wall thereof was broken down.

3. Are any of you poor and reduced in your circumstances, set a double watch upon your conduct, and earnestly pray that God may preserve you from fraud and dissingenuity of every kind. Rather suffer yourselves to be stripped of every thing, and apply to the charity of others, which is not sinful, and ought not to be shameful, than take any dishonest methods of bettering your state. O melancholy thought, that many, when they become desperate in their circumstances, become also desperate in their courses, and drown the reflection of their consciences in slothfulness and sensuality! Sincerity, integrity, patience and sobriety in a ruined fortune, are doubly eminent, at least, whatever they may be in the fight of the world, they are honourable and precious in the fight of God, and of all good men.

Before concluding, suffer me to make one or two reflections on the subject in general; the several parts of which I have now explained. And,

1. On what hath been said on this subject, I would graft this important lesson, that you should not only study to preserve yourselves from sin, but from all such circumstances of temptation as are dangerous to human constancy. This was the very ground of the prayer of the Prophet in my text, and is the substance of the reasons he assigns for his request. We are taught the same thing in the strongest manner, by the several instances of human frailty, and the folly of presumptuous confidence, recorded in Scripture. *Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.* We are also taught the same thing by him who knew
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what was in man, as he has given us directions in the form of prayer which he taught his disciples to say, Lord, *lead us not into temptation.*

Are you really unwilling to do evil, you will be concerned to keep yourselves out of the way of every solicitation to it. This is constantly the effect of a judicious and solid piety, and those who act otherwise shew, that they either have no real goodness, or that they are very weak Christians, and little acquainted either with themselves, or this present evil world.

2. You may learn how necessary it is, that you should look for the Divine assistance and direction, to avoid the temptation of every state of life. We are truly of ourselves unequal to the trials with which we are surrounded. Not that there is any thing unjust or oppressive in the measures of Providence; but because it seems good to our Maker to oblige us to a constant dependence upon himself and his promised help. *But God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*

The least temptation may prove too hard for us, if we neglect to apply for supreme aid; but in Divine strength, we may bid defiance to the most formidable opposition. This temper is well exemplified and described by the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians. *And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecution, in distresses for Christ's sake; for when I am weak then am I strong.*

3. From what hath been said, you may see what an inseparable connection there is between true religion, and
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your employments and state in this present world. They have a mutual, strong, and constant influence upon one another. It is a fatal, though a common error, to separate them; entirely to confine religion to the times and places of immediate worship, and suppose that it hath nothing to do with the maxims of trade and commerce, or other worldly callings. On the contrary, your impressions of things spiritual and eternal, will direct and regulate your views as to the present life; and your successes or misfortunes in worldly schemes will have a certain and visible effect upon your Christian conversation, and the state of your souls. Therefore, let them never be separated in your own views, and let them still be kept in their proper order and subordination. Though the light and trivial use, not only of the name of God, but of scripture-language, is both sinful and dangerous; and though a forward ostentatious piety may sometimes look suspicious, yet it were to be wished we had more of a grave and habitual acknowledgment of God in all our ways. This was the language of the Patriarchs of old. In one of the former discourses upon this subject, I took notice of Jacob's prayer, when he set out for Padan-aram. See after the increase of his family, how he expresses himself in answer to his brother Isaac. *And he lift up his eyes and saw the women and children, and said, who are those with thee? And he said, the children which God hath graciously given thy servant.* See also the Apostolical direction for the manner of projecting our future purposes. *Go to now, ye that say to-day, or to-morrow, we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain.*

4. In the last place, let me beseech, in the tenderest manner, every one of you, rich and poor, to remember an approaching eternity. It will not be long till the honourable

able and despised, the wealthy and the needy, the master and the servant, shall lie down in the dust. Lay hold of that covenant of peace, which is ordered in all things and sure. Hear a great and constant truth: *What is a man profited, though he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul, or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?* How many a Lazarus is now in Abraham's bosom; and how many a rich man, that once lived delicately on earth, is at this moment tormented in hell-fire! The Gospel of peace is now preached in your ears. Believe in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and ye shall be saved. I cannot promise that you shall be rich, but all things necessary are assured to you by the Divine promise; food and raiment, support under trials, strength for duty, and in the world to come, everlasting rest.

SER.

SERMON XXIV.

TRUE RELIGION.

BY

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JAMES iii. 17.

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

THE Saviour of the world, in the dawning of the Gospel, predicted, *That there should arise false Christs and false prophets, and shew great signs and wonders, insomuch that, if it were possible, they should deceive the very elect.* That men should cry, some, *Lo, here is Christ!* and others, *Lo there!* This prophecy, for the confirmation of the truth of Christianity, has been fulfilled in every period of the Christian era. But, perhaps, in no season, and in no part of the globe, hath it received stronger illustration than it doth in the present time in this

western world. Has there been an age in which greater numbers of sects and parties, and variations of parties, have existed than the present? Yet, if there be any in this assembly, in these desultory days of levity, wandering, separation, and unsteadiness, who are sincerely seeking religion, and desiring to know wherein it consists, or what it is, here is an infallible description of it, given by the inspired Apostle James; a man who had sweet experience of its power, and a certain understanding of its happy effects. The Apostle, in this chapter, in order more strongly to shew wherein true religion lies, points out many deviations from it in its professors; and at length, more fully and clearly to characterize it, he introduces two sorts of wisdom; *a wisdom which descendeth not from above*, and *a wisdom that is from above*.

The former wisdom, which is from beneath, he thus delineates. It is *earthly, sensual and devilish*. This, with propriety, may be styled *carnal wisdom*, or a *delusive religion*, which, like the hypocrite's hope, will fail its possessor, when God takes away his soul. This wisdom is described in its origin and fruits. Its source is negatively intimated. *It descendeth not from above*, that is, from heaven, or from God; therefore, the fountain of it must be in earth, or hell, or both. Its delineation fully declares this, when it is affirmed to be *earthly and devilish*. It is carnal, worldly, covetous, hoarding. Whatever garb it may put on, it secretly hates nobleness, generosity, charity and kindness. *It is sensual*; propense to all fleshly gratifications, to intemperance, slothfulness and uncleanness, as far as these sensual indulgences may not be checked or prohibited by the superior influence of meanness and avarice. *It is devilish*, malicious, cunning, crafty and deceitful. This is the nature of that wisdom or religion which is from beneath. What other streams can be supposed

supposed to flow from such a source, than those St James mentions, to wit, bitter envyings, strife, boasting and falsehood? Envyings, with strict justness, are termed bitter, because they are so in their operation and consequences. Envy, what a bitter corroding passion! Solomon of old pronounced it, *the rottenness of the bones!* It is like scaled bones making their way through ulcerated flesh. Envy sometimes gives uneasiness to its object, but always torments the breast in which it is harboured. What stage in life is free from this unhappy temper? The great envy the greater; the middling rank those before it; the poor, the rich; the foolish, the wise; and the lowest class of the human species has a thousand objects, against which their feeble envy is directed, and from which it rebounds to invigorate their misery.

Strife is the next fruit of this carnal religion, and it receives in all its exertions strong reinforcements from envy. *Where strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. He loveth transgression, that loveth strife.* It is aided by pride, and their combination often create a world of mischief. Who can enumerate the evils which strife introduces into families, neighbourhoods, congregations, towns, and even nations? Alienation of affections, reproaches, slander, wars and bloodshed, generally take their origin from strife and envy.

Boasting is another effect of this inferior wisdom. *Glory not*, saith our Apostle. He well knew how congenial *boasting* or *glorying* is to our nature, from whence it springs; and it is of the highest importance to be guarded against it. Of all kinds of boasting, there is none produces a more loathsome odium than a person's boasting of his religion.

The Apostle mentions falsehood as a further fruit of this unhappy earthly and sensual religion. *Lie not against the*

the truth. Lying is a base vice, but never more so, than when it falls from the lips of high professors, or is accompanied with the appearances of great sanctity.

Having thus described the religion that is from beneath, the inspired penman proceeds to direct our attention to another sort of wisdom, in the words of our text. *But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.*

The term Wisdom, in scripture, is frequently used to express precisely the same thing that we mean by Religion. This is generally the use of it in the Proverbs of Solomon, and in his other writings. The Psalmist employs it for the same purpose when he says, *So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom;* that we may devote ourselves to the study and practice of true religion. This is the evident sense of it in this chapter, and especially in this verse before us. The reason, perhaps, why the inspired writers chose so often to express religion by the word wisdom was, because real religion or piety consists greatly in knowledge, discretion, and prudence, which are the eminent constituents of what we commonly call wisdom. Knowledge is so essential a part of religion, that it is said, *They who know God are born of him;* and, *Those who know Jesus Christ have life eternal.* Mere knowledge is not sufficient of itself to constitute wisdom without prudence and discretion also. It is not every knowing man that is a wise man. It is not enough for a man to have a large share of religious knowledge in speculation, but he must be able, and actually make a right improvement and application of his knowledge, in order either to be truly wise or good. A person must not merely be acquainted in theory with the character of God, the nature of his go-

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vernment, the fall and sinfulness of man, the method of salvation by a glorious Redeemer, &c. but the knowledge of these things must have a suitable influence upon his heart and life, so that his temper, disposition, and practice, are reduced to the obedience of the Gospel. When his knowledge is directed by prudence and discretion, in such a manner, whereby he becomes employed in holy exercises and holy duties, then may he be properly denominated wise or religious. *Who is a wise man, and endued with knowledge among you? Let him shew, out of a good conversation, his works with meekness of wisdom.* Indeed, none, in a scriptural sense, can be deemed truly wise or knowing, who have not acquainted themselves with God, who have not known and felt their deplorable state by nature and practice, who have not cordially acquiesced in the plan of salvation, revealed in the Gospel, and devoted themselves to godly contemplations, and to the works of righteousness. All the knowledge, besides this, which the world styles wisdom, is foolishness with God.

Having mentioned these few things to manifest that the term wisdom, in our text, expresses the same idea with the phrase true religion, I shall now proceed to consider its origin and fruits, as they are here exhibited before us.

First, We are here taught, that true religion is from above. It is of a heavenly and divine original; it cometh down from the Father of Lights. All who are sanctified are said to be the workmanship of God, whose glorious and principal dwelling is in the heavens. Christ Jesus, the great author of religion, came down from above. The Holy Ghost, the Comforter and Sanctifier of all that believe, descendeth from on high. The oracles of truth—the words of eternal life—the law and the Gospel, are likewise from the same source: Holy men,
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by the inspired influences of Heaven, were moved to write and speak those things. When God is pleased to make effectual application of his word or providences to the awakening and conversion of a soul, this precious grace descends from above. Thus all wisdom, religion, grace, and goodness, are of a heavenly and divine original; and that which is from any other fountain, is not that religion or wisdom which will save the soul. Hence it is said, *The Lord giveth wisdom; out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.* But this being a thing generally allowed, that all true religion proceeds from God, or descends from above, I would not spend time in labouring this point, but proceed to consider its nature and fruits, as here described.

We have it represented to our view in eight branches or particulars,—a shining groupe of constituents. All the heathen writers combined could not produce such a constellation of virtues. He, who laboriously cons their mighty works, will no where find such a collection; and when he has turned over and spread abroad their mountains of rubbish, no such beautiful gems strike his eager sight! Attend to the Divine description. It is pure, peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy, good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

The first constituent or branch of true religion, or that wisdom which is from above, is *purity*. *It is first pure*, without any undue mixture of maxims, or aims that would debase it—it is free from gross iniquities or moral defilements—not allowing habitually of any known sin, but studious of virtue and holiness, in all manner of conversation. The original word, which is here rendered *pure*, signifies also *chaste* and *modest*; therefore, this term expresses a sweet, modest, decent, chaste, and pure deportment, arising from right principles and proper views.

When true religion is here characterized as *pure*, we must not from hence conceive that a religious person is instantly made *perfect*, that he feels no more the motions of corrupt inclinations and affections, and is no longer guilty of sin, but only that he receives a pure principle or bias, whereby he is enabled to check his evil propensities, to govern and restrain his corruptions, so that sin hath no longer that dominion over him which it formerly held. This principle, received in regeneration, tends to fill the soul with desires after, and will at last issue in perfection. Some may here refer to the interrogation of the Royal Preacher, saying, *Who can say my heart is clean? I am pure from my sin?* It is a sad and humiliating truth, There is none doth good perfectly, no not one. There are none whose hearts or lives are completely clean or perfectly free from sin; yet through the boundless riches of Divine grace, there are many who can rejoice in God, who giveth them the victory over their corruptions, and enables them to foil their spiritual adversaries. As none ought to carry their opinions of religious purity to so great a height as perfection in this life; on the other hand, every one may easily observe, that there is something more intended hereby than a bare abstinence from the outward and gross acts of criminal sensuality. There is more meant than an unimpeached character or a fair external behaviour before men. Men may be, and often are outwardly orderly and regular in their carriage, and yet possess no real and vital piety.—Our Lord speaks of some who had this beautiful and ornamented conduct, that were the reverse of sincerity and purity. He represents them under the strong figure of *whited sepulchres, which appear beautiful outwardly, but within are full of dead mens bones, and of all uncleanness*. Wherefore they, who are the subjects of this purity which descendeth from

from above, are first made pure in heart. *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God; blessed are the undefiled in the way, &c.* These look upon all intemperance, injustice, dishonesty, and sensuality as forbidden by God, warring against the soul, condemned by the gospel of Christ Jesus, and standing in arrayed opposition against their eternal interest. The fear of God, love to the precious Redeemer, a pleasure and delight in propriety, integrity and uprightness, lead them to hate evil. A fixed averfion of the soul from iniquity, is a cardinal constituent of true purity. The hearts, the thoughts, and inclinations of the careless and secure, are entirely disposed to sinful pleasures, and sensual gratifications. They are governed by pride, ambition, covetousness, custom, inconsideration, vanity, or some base lust or other. Harken to St Peter's declaration, *Their eyes are full of adultery, and they cannot cease from sin.* Or shall we go farther back into antiquity and retail the account found there: *Every imagination of the thoughts of their heart is only evil continually.* But when true religion enters the soul, and takes possession of it, another turn to the temper, bias and disposition is given. The thoughts and inclinations of the heart become now prevailingly fixed upon God and divine things, upon the honour of Jesus, the advancement of his kingdom, and their own immortal interests. The breathings of the new born soul are, *Lord, create in me a clean heart, and make me of pure bands.* They are now full of holy purposes, desires, and wishes. They long for the entire mortification of the deeds of the flesh, to yield themselves up soul and body to the service of God, and to be holy and perfect as he is holy and perfect. The heart being thus initiated into purity by the incorruptible seed of Divine principles sown from above, true religion will then display itself in a purity of life, by

avoiding those things, which may dishonour God, wound the conscience, or injure the sacred cause of real piety. Its votaries will avoid, as far as possible, all loose, profane, and vicious company. They will not take the abandoned and notoriously wicked for their chosen companions. They will hate the stains on the forehead, and the garments spotted by the flesh. They will be governed by a dictate of common sense, arising from the gleam of nature's light, when the same is adopted and confirmed by Divine counsel, knowing by experience, *That evil communication corrupts good manners.* Intemperate passions, inordinate appetites, they will diligently guard against. Drunkenness, with all its beastly train, they will carefully shun. The exhortation of our Saviour, with a sweet and an abiding influence, rests upon their minds. *Let us walk honestly as in the day, not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness.* The impurity of revelling, rioting; the baseness of chambering, and wanton looks, wanton hints, words and behaviour, must not put the present theme of modesty and chastity to the blush. Every thing which wears the aspect of uncleanness, dishonour, dishonesty and unrighteousness, will be objects of their peculiar detestation. A ribaldry of conversation will be the abhorrence of their souls; they will not indulge themselves in filthy communication or filthy speaking, nor will they patiently bear it in others. Railing, whispering, backbiting, reviling and slandering, wound their pure feelings. They cannot allow their own tongues this unkind and unchristian latitude, and their souls are often pained with such ebullitions from the mouths of others. Their desire is so pure, that they would wish to speak evil of none; and when they are called by authority, or a just occasion, it is with uneasiness they undertake the disagreeable task. Your talking, glorying, boasting, fault-finding

finding professors, who deal around them an unbridled tongue in rash judgments, censures, obloquy, pious hints, religious innuendos, lamentable reports, and ear-whispered dirty tales, are base Christians, and nuisances in society, both civil and ecclesiastical. They are the reverse of that modesty, purity and chastity, here so beautifully recommended. The constituent branch, the essential nature, or the first fruit of true religion, or the wisdom which descends from above, is, that it is *pure*. Wherefore, *having great and precious promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit: Cleanse your hands ye sinners, and purify your hearts ye double minded.*

The second line in this beautiful picture of true religion is, that it is *peaceable*. First pure, then peaceable. Peace follows after spiritual purity, stands connected with it, and depends upon it. Those who are truly wise, will endeavour to preserve peace where it exists, restore it where it is broken, and recover it where it is lost. Peace, how charming, how entertaining, and captivating to the pure mind! In families, neighbourhoods and societies, where this heavenly wisdom governs men, it renders them peaceable. The distinguished features of a truly religious man are, that he is peaceable, and a peace-maker; he loves peace; peace is his atmosphere; he dwells in peace; and the benign rays of peace flow from him as beams from the sun. Our exalted Mediator, styled the Wisdom of the Father, is called our Peace. An honourable branch of the name of the Most High is, that he is the God of Peace. True peace is the purchase of Christ Jesus, and an effect of the operation of the Spirit of grace. The great design of heaven, in the whole scheme of our redemption, was to accomplish and promote peace; peace between an offended God and offending man; peace of conscience; and peace between the children of men.

The great blessedness of the celestial state is, that all is harmonious, tranquil and peaceable there. We are commanded, *as far as possible, to live peaceably with all men. Follow peace and holiness, without which no man can see the Lord.* The truly religious are not addicted to strifes and contentions; they do not indulge boisterous passions and furious heats; they are peaceable, being governed by the religion of peace. They neither offer wrong to others, nor bitterly revenge wrong when offered to themselves. They know it to be their wisdom to be harmless and innocent; when they are reviled, not to revile again; not to return railing for railing. They have made their peace with God by faith in Christ Jesus—They preserve peace of mind in a diligent discharge of all Christian duties; and endeavour to keep a conscience void of offence. They promote peace among their fellow-men; maintain it in their families, cultivate it in their neighbourhoods; and the establishment of it in church and state, affords them the highest pleasure. They are opposed to schisms, rents, and divisions. They well know that *Cain*, who separated himself, and went out from the presence of God, had a mark set upon him; as also those mentioned by St Jude, who separated themselves, were branded with being *sensual, not having the Spirit.* They attend to the commandments of heaven, which require them *to mark those who cause divisions.* The pious are not only peaceable themselves, but they will be striving to be peace-makers, in order that they may be partakers of the blessings, and interested in the promises of Christ, when he says, *Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called the children of God.* From these things, it is manifest, that all are far from true wisdom, who love to live in differences, and cherish contentions; who prefer throwing oil into a flame rather than water. Many seem as if they cared not whether

ther church or state, or society prospered, or was destroyed, provided their corrupt humours might have room to display themselves and be gratified. But, how far is this temper from the religion which is from above !

Thirdly, This heavenly wisdom is *gentle*. The term gentle signifies patient, easy, moderate. It is rendered moderation, Phil. iv. 5. *Let your moderation be known to all men.* It is translated patient, 1 Tim. iii. 3. It disposes men to treat others with kindness, openness, and candour ; to bear with their infirmities ; to pass over many injuries as if unnoticed ; to forgive offences, and to interpret all things for the best. It is a sweet, equal, and placid spirit. Gentleness stands in opposition to harshness, severity, cruelty, incivility, and acrimony. To be gentle is not to stand upon the extremity of right, not to be punctiliously rigorous in fractions of property, not censorious in judging, not furious in opinion, not rude or overbearing in conversation. He who is governed by this gentle and heavenly religion, will be fair, calm, and equal. He will not kindle into a flame about the precise and perfect boundaries of righteousness with those with whom he has dealings ; he will yield in doubtful and smaller matters, and recede in some things from what he imagines his right, for the sake of love and peace. Virtue and vice stand strongly and eternally distinguished one from another, yet the exact time of separation cannot certainly be determined in a thousand instances. Virtue and vice in this respect may be compared to the colours of the rainbow, which are strikingly discriminated ; yet to fix the perfect line of distinction between colour and colour, or mark, where the one colour ends and the other begins, is impossible to the keenest eye and the most accurate observer. We are commanded *not to be righteous overmuch*. The truly gentle man will be avoiding bitter, unnecessary

and rigorous censures. He will be putting the most candid, charitable and favourable constructions upon the follies and weaknesses of others that they will possibly bear. Gentleness, like charity, hopeth all things, believeth all things, and covereth a multitude of failings. Where differences in sentiments take place, he will not wilfully urge his own opinions beyond their weight, nor wrest his adversary's beyond their intention. He will carefully shun, as far as possible, all vain disputings and wranglings. He will not set himself as the standard of rectitude and perfection, engrossing all conversation where he comes, and deciding as a mighty judge in every matter. He is rather ready to let his moderation and gentleness be known to all, in all things; patiently and sweetly instructing them who oppose themselves, and receiving with all tenderness the weak in faith, though not to doubtful disputations. Wherefore let us all put on the ornament of a meek, quiet, patient, moderate and gentle spirit. *Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*

Fourthly, The wisdom which is from above is *easy to be entreated*. It is of an ingenious facility, and disposes the subject of it to be readily persuaded or prevailed upon to forsake that which is evil, and to follow that which is good. It is true, there is an easiness and persuasibleness which is culpable and base, but it is not a blameable pliability to yield ourselves to the persuasions of Divine truth, and to the just desires and reasonable requests of our fellow-creatures. Many are so self-willed, obstinate and perverse, that they will not relinquish their purpose, when others around them imagine that they must, and do feel the glaring conviction. *A fool in his own conceit is wiser than seven men who can render a reason.* But all those whose hearts have been rendered docile, tractable, and easy to be entreated by Divine grace, are of a very different

rent temper. Although they are determinately fixed in their aversion from that which is sinful, yet they are easily entreated to receive Divine truth, and readily submit to their duty. The unjust judge himself was recommended, in a sort, by our Lord, for his being won by the widow's importunity. The religious will easily yield to the entreaties of others when better reason is discovered. Job would not despise the counsel of his servant,—Moses was persuaded by the advice of Jethro,—and David was prevailed upon by the entreaties of a woman. Many, after sufficient conviction of what is right is administered to them, will not drop their purpose, but either with a sulky obstinacy, or an outrageous fury, adhere to their assertions. But those who are made wise from on high, are not self-willed, but easily entreated.

Fifthly, The wisdom which is from above is full of mercy. The truly pious are disposed to every thing that is kind, benevolent, charitable, and good; feel compassion for the miserable,—inclined to relieve those that want, and to forgive those who offend. Some are ready to apprehend clemency a disgrace, as if it argued men void of fortitude and spirit; but in the Divine judgment it is quite the reverse: *It is the glory of a man to pass over a transgression!* It is Christianity to pardon and forgive, but it is grossly wicked to be malicious and revengeful. The religious man will feel a tender compassion for transgressors, easily pass over and forgive offences offered to him. He thinks of his own innumerable trespasses against God, for which he hopes for compassion and forgiveness, and that it would be enormously cruel in him not to forgive the little trespasses of his brethren of mankind. A Christian sympathy arises in his soul, when he beholds objects of distress. At seasons he enters into the feelings, pains, and sickness of the afflicted. He does not avoid

avoid the chambers of anguish. He submits to the force of this Divine counsel: *To him that is afflicted, pity should be shewed from his friend.* In a special manner, when he perceives any poor or in want, he will not be over inquisitive how they came into such circumstances; but his soul will be drawn out to deal his bread to the hungry, according to his ability and their necessity. *Whoso bath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?* He who is wise to salvation knows, on the one hand, the benediction which Christ pronounced,—*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy*; and on the other, he trembles at the denunciation of our Apostle,—*They shall have judgment without mercy, who have shewed no mercy.* Therefore, my brethren, let us be all attention to the exhortation of St Paul to the Colossians, *As the elect of God, put on bowels of mercy.*

The sixth constituent of true religion is, that it is full of good fruits. *Full of mercy and good fruits.*—The description rises upon us. Religion is not a barren tree, but brings forth in abundance; and the fruits which it produces are good, such as promote the glory of God, and the highest interest and happiness of man. *Herein, saith our Lord to his followers, is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit, so shall ye be my disciples.* By good fruits are undoubtedly meant all the outward duties of piety and righteousness which we owe to God and our neighbour. Thus religion will always produce morality and good works. In vain we make a show of religion, and hope for the blessings of it without good morals. Good works are essential to true religion in all adult persons. The latter cannot exist without the former. *Let your light so shine before men, that others, seeing your good works,*

works, may be induced to glorify their Father which is in heaven. This is the great end of their renovation or conversion. *They are the workmanship of God, created unto good works.* This was a principal design of Christ's coming into the world; of his humiliation and passion, that he should purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. Hence it is absolutely certain, that the subjects of this heavenly religion must be, in some considerable measure, habitually adorned with good fruits.

A seventh property of this excellent wisdom is, that it is *without partiality*. The Greek term signifies being without a partial, wrangling, suspicious, judging temper; so that there is no English word fully expressive of the original. The really pious will not be guilty of base wrangling, undue surmises, or unreasonable suspicions; they will not be given to hasty or partial judging, respecting persons, through outward splendour or party affection. They are not such as those described by St Jude, *who have mens persons in admiration because of advantage*. They do not suspiciously enquire into the faults of others, nor deal partially among men. They esteem and treat every one according to his apprehended worth, and carry themselves superior to the mean spirit of partiality, uncandid conjecture, and destructive censoriousness. Uprightness, integrity, candour, and honour, attend them in all their commerce with mankind. But,

Eighthly, The last branch of this beautiful delineation of true religion is, that it is *without hypocrisy*. It wears no mask, disguise or deceitfulness. Those managements and practices which the world count wise, consisting in craft and guile, it cannot away with. It is sincere, open, steady, and uniform, and consistent with itself. Carnal men oftentimes pretend to be what they are not; and many of them for strange purposes will pretend to be religious,

ligious, but they cannot possibly hold out, or act uniformly to the end; and when the irregularity of their conduct flashes the conviction of absurdity and inconsistency upon them, they will sometimes drop the mask, and appear what they always really were. But the truly good man's principal care is, to be what he seems.—The desires of his heart are to be devoted to God in Christ in sincerity; to walk in duty with a true mind, and to do the things which are honest in the sight of all men. He intends not, by a profession of Christianity, to impose upon God, the church, or mankind. His love to God and his neighbour is without dissimulation, abhorring that which is evil, and cleaving to that which is good. Honesty and faithfulness dwell with him. Chicanery, cunning, tricking, and artfulness enter not into his habitation. An undissembled sincerity marks all his conduct, and shines in all his conversation. The pure breathings of their hearts are, to be able to say with the great Apostle of the Gentiles, *Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world.*—Let us see that we have *that faith which is unfeigned, and love not only in word and tongue, but in deed and in truth.*

I proceed to close this subject with a very brief improvement.

I. It must awaken in every mind sentiments of sorrow and lamentation. Alas! if these things be so, how small the number of the truly pious or good! How few, how very few can the most extensive charity observe, who are *first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy!* May we not justly take up the lamentation of the weeping Prophet, and say, *O that our heads*

were

were waters, and our eyes a fountain of tears, that we might weep day and night, over the slain of the daughters of our people; over decayed love, loose morals, and wasted religion! Is it not a melancholy truth, that many in all the assemblies of our people are treacherous men? they bend their tongues like their bow for lies; they are not valiant for the truth upon the earth; for they proceed from evil to evil, and know not me, saith the Lord. What serious mind, without pain, can contemplate mankind, and behold one wallowing in all impurities; another governed by angry and peace-destroying passions; one addicted to knavery and dishonesty; a second outraging the sacred laws of truth; a third indulging himself in gross intemperance; a fourth belching out torrents of profanity, &c. Tears ran down the Psalmist's eyes when he beheld men transgressing God's law. How should true Christians mourn over the abominations which every where almost abound in these days of degeneracy!

2. This doctrine naturally leads us to examine and try ourselves, whether we possess that wisdom which comes down from above, or whether we are the subjects of true religion as described in the Divine oracles. God has issued this injunction, *Try your own selves*. Wherefore, let us bring ourselves to this touchstone of sincerity. Of what sort is our religion? Is it the wisdom from beneath, which is earthly, sensual, devilish, full of envy, malice, confusion, and every evil work? Or, is it the wisdom that descendeth from above, that is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. Our Saviour affirms, *The tree is known by his fruits*. What fruits does our religion produce? Let us solemnly bring ourselves to this doctrine, as to a criterion, by which we may learn our real state and character.

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Are we *pure*? Are our hearts purified by Divine grace? Are we opposed in heart to sin, and do we abhor all moral defilements? Do we avoid evil company, vicious conversation, and prohibited indulgences? Do we delight in God; meditate on things holy and spiritual; striving to keep our minds pure and pious? Is Christ Jesus, and the way of salvation through faith in his blood, precious to us?

Are we *peaceable*? cultivating peace with God; following the things which make for peace among mankind; maintaining peace in our consciences, families, neighbourhood and church? Do we avoid wrath, angry disputations and contention?

Are we *gentle*? Are we moderate, patient, meek, modest, harmless and inoffensive?

Are we *easy to be entreated*? easily persuaded to that which is rational, decent, just and proper? Are we readily induced to forsake that which is wrong, and to practise that which is good?

Are we *full of mercy*? tender, kind, and compassionate; ready to forgive those that offend, to pity the wicked, feel for the distressed, and relieve the poor and miserable?

Are we full of *good fruits*? Do we make it an object of our attention to do good to all as we have opportunity? Are we diligent and careful in the performance of duty towards God and man? Are we doing justly, loving righteousness, and practising *strict* honesty? Are we rich in good works, and do others seeing our works glorify God?

Are we *without partiality*? Are we free from groundless suspicions, evil surmises, rash judgments, underhand dealings, sinister and partial decisions? When we are called

called to speak or act, do we perform our duty without favour or affection?

Are we all this, *without hypocrisy*? Are we what we seem to be, or what we profess and pretend? Are we, as far as we know our own hearts, unfeigned and sincere in all our conduct before God and man?

What matter do these reflections afford for humiliation, repentance and amendment? Those who have ground of hope towards God, let them be quickened to increase in every Christian virtue, and in every branch of piety. *Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.* Let hypocrites drop their masks, and impure sinners awake to consideration. *Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.*

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SER.

SERMON XXV.

THE BARREN FIG-TREE.

BY

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MARK xi. 12, 13, 14.

And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry; and seeing a fig-tree afar off, having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon; and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet: And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard it.

FRUITFULNESS in religion, love, faith, humility and devotion towards God; purity, temperance and chastity towards ourselves; and righteousness, truth, mercy and charity towards our neighbours, are of infinite importance. Not bringing forth fruits meet for repentance, barrenness, or unprofitableness, are heinous evils indeed. They dishonour God, frustrate the design of the blessed

blessed gospel, injure society, and entail certain ruin upon the immortal soul. This we have finely illustrated, and strongly enforced in this history before us, of our Lord's destruction of the barren fig-tree.

Before we proceed to the intention of Christ Jesus in this transaction, and the use which we ought to make of it, some observations may be made upon the objections which have been offered to this relation. As St Matthew relates this story, there is no difficulty attending it whatsoever. He informs us what our Lord did with respect to the fig-tree, without adding any circumstances of the action. But St Mark has occasioned some perplexity, and many evil remarks from prejudiced readers, by his more particular and circumstantial account. He has added two expressions, from which the enemy of Christianity have endeavoured to give a disadvantageous idea of its author. To what St Matthew says of this fact, St Mark subjoins these two circumstances; the one, *If haply he might find any thing thereon*; and this other, *for the time of figs was not yet*.

By the *first* of these expressions, it appears that the expectations of our Lord were raised by seeing a fig-tree afar off; he hoped to relieve his hunger, supposing there might be fruit on a tree, which promised so well at a distance. But, *when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves*.—Here this question has been reproachfully asked, to the stumbling of the weak, and the distress of the sincere, "How can this consist with the divinity and perfection of Jesus Christ, that he should be deceived or mistaken?" But this may be easily solved. Outward objects made the same impression upon our Saviour which they did upon other men. In common life he acted as men ordinarily do in similar circumstances. Therefore, the fig-tree presented to his sight when he was

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hungry,

hungry, raised in him the desires and sensations it would have done in another. Hunger was a sensation our Lord felt in common with other men. It was a natural appetite, and to be satisfied in the usual way. He never wrought miracles when there was no need of them, or no important end to be answered by them. Hence, we find him sending his disciples to buy provisions; he asks water to drink of a Samaritan woman, &c. Our Lord, notwithstanding he thought it no robbery to be equal with the Father, and did claim equal homage and worship, and was a Divine person, yet was truly and really man; subject to all the appetites, infirmities, and imperfections proper to human nature, sin only excepted.

In this view, we can easily explain that observation of St Luke, relating to our Saviour, *That he increased in wisdom and stature*; that is, he improved in body and mind; he grew wise—he advanced in knowledge and understanding, as he advanced in years. He acquired human knowledge as others do in a way of observation, experience, reasoning and reflection. Jesus Christ, as man, was not born with a fund of knowledge, or with all that stock of ideas which he was ever to have.

These remarks plainly obviate the difficulty.—No imperfection can be imputed to our Lord from what is here said in this passage, only such as is the necessary consequence of human nature. Though his knowledge, as man, was not absolutely perfect, it can no more be a diminution of his character, than it can to any other person, that his science is not infinite.

I have not gone into these observations on the imperfections of the human nature in Christ, merely to solve the difficulty in this text, but to place this subject in a just and true light. A proper idea of this matter will render many apparent difficulties in Scripture easy and plain,

plain. The want of attention here often leads to confusion in the minds, and discourses of some, while they seem to talk and think as if the human was swallowed up in the Divine nature.

The knowledge of Christ may be considered in a threefold view; as Divine, human and inspired. His Divine knowledge, as God, is infinite and infallible—his human, as man, was limited, uncertain, and acquired by degrees—his inspired knowledge was also partial, and communicated to him at seasons.

In relation to the first sort Simon Peter must be understood to speak, when he ascribes all knowledge to Jesus, even of the secrets of the heart.—*Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee.*—Of his human knowledge St Mark here speaks in our text. His prophetic knowledge, mentioned in many places, is plainly confirmed in the beginning of the revelation. *The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him.*

Further, it is proper to be remarked, with regard to the actions of our Saviour, they were often done upon very different motives from what appeared at first to the spectators. His actions, as well as his discourses, were designed for instruction. There was often a moral in his behaviour, as well as in his parables. When he girded himself with a towel, and washed his disciples feet, he had more in view than merely to cleanse them. His intention was to teach them humility, condescension, kindness, love, and a train of virtues, in the most moving and sensible manner. Yet they did not take his design till it was expressly explained to them. Thus is the case before us; he went to the fig-tree, not merely to satisfy his hunger, but to instruct his disciples throughout all ages; to teach them, who were present with him, the future destiny of Jerusalem for their misimprovement of the most

distinguished advantages; and all others the danger of barrenness, and the absolute necessity of fruitfulness in the ways of God. This was not adverted to by the disciples, till our Lord explained his conduct. From hence, in this transaction, attending to all the characters our Lord sustained, it is evident he was neither deceived nor mistaken. He might have known it was barren, and have gone to it for this reason, to illustrate his purpose, and exhibit the great evil of barrenness in religion to all mankind.

The *second* difficulty imagined in the text is derived from these words, *The time of figs was not yet*. Therefore, some prejudiced readers of the New Testament have triumphed in an objection found here to Christianity, as though it absolutely demolished the whole system. As if the total sum of evidence, in favour of the Christian religion, was really confronted and set aside by the ignorant and superficial force of a single remark. Our English translation of these words is, perhaps, not so happily expressed, but the original is plain, obvious, and easy to every candid and fair mind. *The time of gathering in the figs was not yet*. That is, they were now ripe on the trees, fit for use or to eat, but not yet carried in, or laid up in their stores. Now, could there possibly be either folly or weakness in expecting to find fruit proper upon this tree, which had leaves as other fruit-bearing trees, and looked green and flourishing at a distance. We have another precisely similar phrase used by St Matthew, which has never been objected to by any, because plainly translated. *The time of the fruit*. The fruit was ripe, the season of harvest came, therefore the husbandman sent his servants to receive the fruits of his vineyard; but he also was mistaken or disappointed*.

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* *Καὶρὸς ὄρνεν*, and *Καὶρὸς τῶν καρπῶν*, Matt. xxi. 34. are phrases communicating precisely similar ideas; and with regard to time or season.

I should not have made these remarks for the removal of seeming difficulties in our text, only for the sake of some, who are extremely fond of objections against the Scriptures, and desirous of improving every little thing in criticism, or in their chronology, to weaken, if not to destroy their pretensions to a Divine original.

We shall now attend to the moral sense and design of our Saviour, in this action of destroying the barren fig-tree, and the improvement which we ought to make of it.

To illustrate the intention of our Lord in this action, it may be observed, that the Prophets in the Old Testament, to express their prophecies, and the comminations of Heaven against the Jews, employed not only words, but such symbolical actions, as did in the most lively manner paint their folly, their stupidity, sin, and punishment. This Jesus, who taught superior to men, and astonished them with his doctrine, imitates in this branch of his conduct. It is evident, that by the fig-tree is intended the Jewish nation, the then church and people of God, who had long enjoyed the means of grace, and the most eminent privileges, both civil and sacred; its barrenness signifies their unfruitfulness, their ingratitude, baseness, rebellion,

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son, the ideas are the same. Both of them signify the season of harvest, or the time of gathering in the respective fruits.

I shall only mention one authority, out of many, in support of this interpretation. It is Dr Macknight, in his Harmony of the Four Gospels, vol. 2. page 104.—“*Kairos evxav*, properly signifies the season of gathering figs, as *Kairos tav xaprov*, Matt. xxi. 34, signifies, the season of gathering the fruits. In construing this passage, the latter clause must be joined with the words, *he came if haply he might find any thing thereon*; for the Evangelist tells us, that the season of gathering figs was not yet come, to show that none had been taken off the tree, and consequently having its whole produce upon it, there was nothing improper in Christ's expecting fruit then.”

rebellion, backsliding, and wickedness; by Christ's cursing it, is pointed out their awful doom, their extermination as a kingdom, their excision as a church, and their total ruin and dispersion through all nations. They, who were once the most favourite people of Heaven, became the most contemptible people on earth. Are the savages in our wilderness, the inhabitants of Ethiopia, or the Hottentots upon the African sterile shores; are any of these so hated, so persecuted, so evil entreated, or so despised, as the barren, ejected, and dispersed Jews? Look upon the fig-tree, it withers, dies, and is no more; look upon the Jews for seventeen hundred years and more, and you are ready to say they are damned.

This horrid state of the Jews, a people favoured of heaven above all nations of the earth, had been often delineated by their Messiah in the strongest images, and in striking parables of obvious application. An instance of which let us select from the twenty-first chapter of Matthew.

"A certain householder planted a vineyard, manured and bedged it, furnished it with every convenient building, every utensil, and every apparatus; in this fair and inviting situation he rented it to tenants; and when the time for receiving his income came, he sent his servants to collect it; the tenants having lived well, and by this time finding themselves rich, they supposed themselves the lords of the manor; they stood ready to dispute the title; they beat one servant, killed another, stoned a third, and drove them off the land. Other servants were sent; the same treatment, and worse ensued. Lastly, he sent his son, in rational expectation that he would awe them into reverence and submission. But they were too far gone in wickedness to be reclaimed. When they beheld him, their wicked hearts exulted, saying, This is the heir, come, let us kill

kill him and possess all. No sooner is their horrid resolve formed than executed. Our Lord applies this stinging parable in a pointed address to the Jews? What is proper for the Lord of the vineyard to do to those men? Their guilty consciences constrain them to answer: He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and let it out to others, who will render him the fruits in their seasons. Then saith Jesus to them, This justice will God perform; the kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof."

This same thing the Prophet Isaiah had long before predicted, and in the most beautiful, moving, and eloquent manner represented. Attend to the picture he draws: *My well-beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill; he fenced it, gathered out the stones thereof; planted it with the choicest vine; built a tower in the midst of it; and also made a winepress therein; and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard! What could have been done more for my vineyard that I have not done in it? Therefore I will utterly destroy it and lay it waste; there shall come up briars and thorns in it; and the clouds shall rain no rain upon it. Thus the house of Israel was barren, wicked, and unprofitable, and destruction to the uttermost came upon them.*

Having thus illustrated our Lord's intention in this action of blasting the barren fig-tree, it is easy to collect what instruction it affords, and what use we ought to make of it. The slightest consideration of it will serve to teach us these two lessons.

I. That where God grants eminent blessings, and affords the means of grace, he reasonably expects the fruits of holiness.

II. That unfruitfulness under the bounties of heaven, and the light and ordinances of the Gospel, is a dangerous and evil condition. Our Saviour's coming to the tree to seek fruit, fully suggests the one; and his cursing it for its barrenness, the other.

In respect to the *first*, when God bestows his favours, he expects proper and suitable returns; where he grants the means of grace, the Gospel and its ordinances, he reasonably expects the fruit they are calculated to produce. How is it to be wished, that the generality of Christians were more sensible of this! If we lived more deeply under this impression, we should maintain a more lively sensation of the necessity of holiness and virtue; there would be hopes then we would make it more seriously our study and care to comply with the obligations of religion. Multitudes in the present day seem so regardless of practical piety, that it is to be feared they adjust their opinions to their conversation and conduct. They separate the branches of religion, and reduce its importance in such a manner, that their minds are quiet and easy, though their lives are exceedingly irregular. One, who is notoriously intemperate in drinking, yet he declares himself an honest man in all his dealings; this renders all peaceable and safe within. Another is addicted to profane swearing; but he thinks no harm, and is charitable, kind, and benevolent, and this supports his hope. A third, covetous, griping, and unjust; yet he prays, goes constantly to church, and his seat is never empty at sacrament; his peace is joy, and his hope assurance. A fourth carries a bitter, censorious, false, slander-ing and backbiting tongue; but he was convinced and converted in mode and form, at such a time and place; therefore his mountain stands strong, and his comfort can-

not be shaken by little immoralities. A fifth is mean, churlish, peevish, troublesome, and vexatious to his family and all around him; but he can tell an excellent story of experiences, therefore his conscience calmly basks on the mountains of tranquillity, without any painful fears or doubts. Thus deluded man poises virtues against vices, balances down immoralities with greater religion, calms the furies of his conscience, and floats down the current of perdition.

If, my brethren, we attend more to reason and revelation, and less to the false dictates and prejudices of our own corrupted hearts, we should surely be better Christians. We should be effectually convinced that God has immoveably fixed the uniform religion and obedience of his rational creatures at too high a value to dispense with any branch of them. Universal holiness and righteousness are of such infinite moment with God, that he sent his only begotten Son to suffer and die for the world, in order that men should be made holy, and reduced to the obedience of the laws of rectitude and purity. With this view he has granted the revelation of his will—his sabbaths, statutes, and the means of grace. He instructs by his word—admonishes by his Providence—alarms by his threatenings—allures by his promises, and deals with us by his Holy Spirit. Surely God has high designs in conferring rich temporal mercies, and spiritual immunities, privileges, and blessings upon his people and his church. It is that they may be fruitful, rich in good works, pure and holy in all manner of conversation.

Does the husbandman plow and sow without view to a crop? Does he dig, manure, and dress his vineyard without expectation of fruit? God is often, in holy writ, compared to a husbandman; the reason is obvious, and the above queries sufficiently suggest it. Can we suppose
that

that the Majesty of heaven, who does not suffer the abuse of temporal mercies to pass unpunished, will not resent the misimprovement of spiritual and heavenly things? Did he display the light of his glorious Gospel only that a rebellious and obstinate world might shut their eyes against it, and harden their hearts? Did he give his Son, his only begotten Son, that the Jews and Gentiles might first shed his blood, and the more impious and ungrateful Christians afterwards trample on it as an unholy thing? Does he bestow his Spirit to move upon the heart merely to be quenched and grieved? Surely such conduct is a contradiction of heaven, and a reception of its grace in vain.

Are there any expectations of God, in consequence of his bestowment of great and eminent blessings, improper or unreasonable? Is it not infinitely just and fit that he should expect a due improvement of the means and advantages we enjoy? That we should be grateful for his benefits? That we should love him, and render him the most chearful duty and obedience of heart and life? That we should walk by the light of his revelation, believe in Christ, submit to the Gospel, renounce sin and the world, and be no longer slaves to them?

These things are the dictates of reason and scripture. Our wickedness cannot hurt God, nor our righteousness profit him; yet an holy God expects the fruits of holiness from us. How often does the blessed Saviour compare his word to seed, and his hearers to ground, which he pronounces good or bad according as it does, or does not bring forth fruit? The Gospel every where testifies, that the great end of all the benefits of God the Father and God the Son to men, is, *That being made free from sin, and become the servants of God, they should have their fruit unto holiness, and, in the end, everlasting life.*

Now,

Now, my brethren, look into your hearts and lives. You enjoy all the means of grace and salvation. Are you made better by them? You have the word of God to read, and it is abundantly preached unto you. Do they make any proper impression upon your hearts? Are you sanctified by them? Are you awakened to any serious concern about your souls? Do you make conscience of prayer, and the duties of piety and devotion? Are you diligent in moral and relative duties? Are you peaceable neighbours, comfortable friends, good husbands, affectionate wives, faithful parents, dutiful children, kind masters, and obedient servants? Are your hearts thus established in grace, your lives shining in godliness, and your fruits the fruits of righteousness?

After all the pains of Heaven, and the mercies God hath bestowed upon you, after all the love of God, the sufferings of Christ, the stirrings of the Spirit, the labours of ministers, and the prayers and tears of parents, are there not many of you still under the power and dominion of sin, in the gall of bitterness, and bonds of iniquity? Remember, O sinners, your day of grace and mercy will come to an end! If you spend the residue of life, as that which is past, who can paint the horror of the ruin and destruction which will be your fate? Your meditations ought to be infinitely interested in these things. This will be readily discerned, and glare like sun-beams from a sea of glass, in the next observation; that,

II. Upon Christ's cursing the fig-tree, it was immediately blasted, and perished from the roots. From hence we infer, that barrenness or unfruitfulness, under the blessings and ordinances of the Gospel, and the means of grace, is an awful and dangerous state. Hear what St Paul says in this case: *The earth which drinketh in the rain*

rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God; but that which beareth thorns and briars is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned. Attend to the words of our Lord, the deciding and final judge of the conduct of men. *Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none; cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?* Oh! how soon may a poor careless sinner be hardened into a reprobate sense, and hurled into irretrievable woe! Soon the day of grace may set, and rise with you no more for ever! You may exhaust eternity in excruciating groans, *That the harvest is past, and the summer is ended, and we are not sowed.*

Behold, O careless sinner, the barren and fallen leaves around you! How many are drying up from the roots, and dropping into the invisible world? Some dying in a miserable, some in a doubtful state; some in the full career of their sins, and others amidst the purposes of future repentance.—Dost thou, O barren sinner, dare the justice, omnipotence, and jealousy of Almighty God? Or dost thou still foolishly presume on despised grace and insulted mercy? He who spared not the angels who fell, who spared not his only Son, will he spare you, O stupid Christians, who persist, in defiance of light, to despise his grace and mercy? He that spared not his chosen people, the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, his friends:—What! Shall the question drop from my lips? Will he spare and save you?—No. The blinded mind, and even the seared conscience must spurn the thought. Alas! is the indignation of heaven, the wrath, tribulation and anguish from the Eternal King lost, as the passing wind, upon you? Have the torments of hell no terror? Arouse, O barren soul! open thine eyes! shake thyself! flee destruction,

struction, before thou art enwrapped in liquid sheets of endless flames!

If preaching, and the other ordinances of God, cannot affect your adamantine hearts, and bring forth the penitential resolve, and induce you, in sincerity, to yield up your hearts to the blessed Jesus, to walk in the ways of righteousness, and to become fruitful Christians, attend the dying rooms of barren souls, closing their eyes upon all terrestrial things! Follow them in your contemplations to the land of darkness; and, in your retired moments, consider their final doom, and ask yourselves, where is it probable they are gone? See how friends and relatives bend over the departing life; they render strong groans for weak; they sigh at the intervals; they restrain their own breath to hear the departing—the long intermitted gasp returns no more! Loud laments fill the chambers—open the creaking, groaning doors—flash through the inferior apartments—burst forth in horrid peals, and follow the barren spirit down to eternal perdition!—*Now is the accepted time—now is the day of salvation*—is the last voice to Gospel reprobates this side hell!

Lord, have mercy upon us! Amen.

S E R.

SERMON XXVI.

ON HONESTY.

BY

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HEBREWS xiii. 18.

We trust we have a good conscience in all things, willing to live honestly.

THAT kind of beauty which arises from harmony and proportion, is in no writings so visible or so perfect as in the Holy Scriptures. The religion therein revealed to mankind, is a system of perfect and universal order and harmony. There is such a sacred connection between the truths and duties, such a regular dependence of one part upon another, that any disadjustment or neglect of one, mars the general symmetry, and produces a measure of deformity and confusion. There is a just and universal tendency in the *whole*, to the same uniform effect and end; and every particular truth and duty unites

to

to promote the ultimate design of the *whole*. In this system there is no interference in the several branches of truth or duty; one truth or duty does not juggle out another; each has its proper place and proper consequence; and therefore calculated in infinite wisdom to answer the general and great intention, which is the glory of God and the perfection and felicity of intelligent creatures. Those truths and duties, which relate to God, stand as the first principles of the system; those, which relate to ourselves and our neighbour, arise as infallible and necessary consequences from these. And so strict and certain is the connexion, that the whole is injured by an infringement of the consequences, as of the principal parts.

Thus is true religion described in the sacred oracles; and thus it is when transferred to the heart by the operations of the Holy Spirit. Religion in the heart, in some good degree, corresponds to religion in the word, as face answers to face in a glass. As the truths and duties of religion promote piety to God, and an holy regard to the Lord Jesus Christ, so they also produce a due respect to, and a practical observance of every social virtue. Hence, how beautiful and amiable is a truly religious character! One branch of religion doth not exclude another; a Christian's respect and duty to God is so far from injuring, that above all things it promotes his duty to his neighbour. It is the Divine commandment, *that he should love his neighbour as himself*; and he that loveth God, *will keep his commandments*.—On the other hand, duty and respect to his neighbour, or the practice of social duties will never preclude or diminish his regard to God, or the duties of devotion. Every duty holds its proper place in the general system. Love to God, and faith in Christ Jesus, oblige us to treat our neighbour with propriety; and our honest and virtuous conduct towards our neigh-

bour will never allow us to enjoy the approbation of our own minds, or to have a good conscience, without a supreme regard and duty to God.

From this view of things, it is evident, that all appearances of religion are defective and wrong, which do not promote the duties incumbent upon us in our social connections as men and Christians. The more religion reigns in the heart towards God, the more love and duty will increase towards our neighbour; with more care and diligence will the social duties be cultivated and discharged. That religion, which is of the operation of God, purifies the heart from the old leaven of malice, wickedness, dishonesty and unrighteousness, and forms the soul to the love and practice of candour, charity, goodness, integrity and uprightness. All religious affections and exercises, unaccompanied with the moral virtues, are delusive and spurious. Holiness and social virtue are inseparable in the nature of things, and in the revelation of heaven to man. The former cannot exist without the latter, nor can the latter be genuine and durable without the former. Some persons, in great zeal and apparent warmth in religious and devotional exercises, will speak meanly of morality and social virtue, and others again will cry up morality and social duties as all in all. But both these are deviations from that real religion which secures peace of conscience, and leads to everlasting life. The Holy Scriptures teach us, that the practice of piety, godliness, social virtue and morality, are all beautifully connected, and go hand in hand. They no where admit of such notions of religion as exclude morality, nor such a preference and practice of morality as weakens or supersedes the obligations of religion in its most exalted branches or spiritual exercises. Each must possess its due influence on the Christian life in all proper exercise, frames and practice. Accordingly

we find our Lord and his Apostles always inculcating the duties of both tables upon their hearers. Our divine Redeemer, when he exhibits a comprehensive view of the whole duty of man, and of the requisitions of Heaven, does it in this manner : *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself.* And the great St Paul, the supposed author of this epistle to the Hebrews, who was eminent for his displaying and dwelling upon the doctrines of grace, is no less distinguished for his enforcing the social virtues, and enjoining the duties of morality. He recommends them in general, agreeably to the example of his Master, *in love to our neighbour* ; and he enlarges throughout his letters upon every particular branch of social and relative duty. And here, in the words of our text, with great propriety and energy, he recommends the virtue of honesty.—This is a part of Christian morality of a superior kind. Without it we cannot expect the favour of God, the friendship and esteem of mankind, nor peace in our own minds, in moments of sober reflection. When the Apostle hopes, with regard to himself and these Hebrew Christians, that they had a good conscience, he strongly intimates, that the goodness of their conscience arose from the disposition they had to practise this amiable and necessary virtue. *We trust we have a good conscience in all things, willing to live honestly.* Sincere desires and endeavours to live honestly, both procure a good conscience, and are evidences of it. A good conscience is a sweet companion, and a continual entertainment ; it brings in a large revenue of tranquillity, satisfaction, joy and consolation, to the breast in which it dwells, under the frowns of the world, and all the varying aspects of Divine Providence.

Honesty is a Christian virtue of a very general nature ; it extends to all the relations which take place among the

children of men : But, in particular, it refers to our commerce, bargains, promises and dealings, one with another. It is truly a melancholy recollection, that there are so many violations of this virtue among mankind, especially among them who name the name of Christ, and have thereby obliged themselves to depart from all iniquity. The considerations by which it is recommended to us from reason and religion, however convincing and numerous, are not always powerful enough to impress the conscience, and hold us to the steady observation of honesty in our conduct. Such is the degeneracy of human nature, and so deeply are the seeds of depravity implanted in our souls, that slight occasions oftentimes prove victorious temptations to dishonesty, weaken our regards to righteousness, and lead us to injure our fellow-creatures. But to render our consciences more tender,—to enable them more faithfully to perform their office,—to cause us to avoid and abhor dishonesty more, and to strengthen our resolutions in favour of integrity, let us a little, in the

First place, open the fountains from whence dishonesty flows.

Then, *secondly*, mention some considerations and motives to induce us to be conscientiously honest in all our employments, business and conversation.

First, In order to illustrate the excellency and importance of this virtue of honesty, we shall point out some of the fountains from whence the opposite vice flows, or some of the chief causes of dishonesty. Opposites frequently illustrate each other to great advantage. The beauty and charms of Christian virtue gain strength, by arousing in us an indignation and abhorrence of mean, base,

base, and immoral practices. Honesty will appear more noble, honourable and god-like, by awakening a proper disgust, and hatred of the odious deformity of dishonesty.

With regard to the chief springs of dishonesty, they may be contemplated both in a general and particular view. Under a general consideration, dishonesty arises from the same common source with all other kinds of abominations and iniquities. It arises from the awful depravity and corruption of the human heart, which is *deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked*; and from whence, according to our Lord's account, *proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies*. An evil fountain, indeed, that sends forth such streams of pollution!—But the more particular causes of dishonesty are such things as these:

1. Slothfulness, idleness, and an aversion to labour and the business of our calling. In some, this vice may be considered, in measure, as constitutional. They are naturally slothful and sluggish. They incline to do nothing with a proper spirit, either serviceable to themselves or others. In others it is contracted and acquired. They are naturally active enough; but by improper management, by indulgence of a wandering fancy, by contracting a fondness for company and folly, they become impatient of application to business; they feel a reluctance to the confinement of labour, and of their occupation; industry is relinquished; an inattention to their word, and a breach of promises follow. These are in great danger of practising dishonesty in one sort or another. They offer a thousand untrue, dishonest, and shuffling excuses to their employers for not having done their work,—they lose their custom,—their circumstances become pressing and uneasy,—they can obtain credit no longer,—they must have a livelihood;—therefore recourse must be had to some disho-

nest methods to obtain it. Hence they are tempted to over-reaching, cheating, defrauding, pilfering, and even perhaps to notorious theft and robbery.—They imagine evil upon their beds, and study schemes of dishonesty. This was the unhappy case of the unjust steward. To work he had not been used, and to beg he was ashamed; hence he resolves immediately to practise knavery and dishonesty. Behold, how readily evil devices occur to a proud man averse and refused to labour.—The forsaking of industry is the abandoning of honesty. How many are there whose honour and pride would be mortally wounded by returning to their trades or manual labour, and yet in the full gratification of their pride, and in consistence with their honour, falsely so called, they can be guilty of the most crafty, lying, and villanous practices. O honour! how art thou prostituted and perverted! The greatest dishonour and disgrace to human nature must now be submitted to, rather than an honest and honourable application to the business of our callings. If our notions of religion should become as wild and extravagant, as the notions of many are of honour, it will soon come to pass, that the greatest villain will be deemed the most religious man.

Industry, and a careful attention to our employments in life, are of essential importance to true honour and honesty; and they are equally so to real religion and Christian morality. Idleness is an exuberant fountain of a multitude of evils. It contains not a tint of virtue or piety. It is an evil, pure and unmixed: It contains not a spice of religion, morality, honour or honesty. What must be the streams flowing from such an *avernian* source? All polluted, odious, and to be detested. Let every Christian turn away his head with abhorrence of the idol of indolence. Attend to St Paul's address to the sauntering Christians

Christians in Thessalonica. *We hear there are some among you that walk disorderly, and work not at all, but are busy, and yet idle bodies; we command and exhort such by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. And those who will not work; What does he say? Does he grant them an allowance of dishonest and shifting contrivances? No, they should starve, they should not eat.*

Now, my brethren, let us abhor idleness and laziness as odious vices, and the sources of horrid evils in time and in eternity. Let us be peculiarly careful to inure ourselves, and form our children to habits of application and industry. Let us oblige them to a steady attendance upon their schools, and to such business as every year of their age is capable of. The great bulk of mankind are made or ruined, in soul and body for ever, before they are eighteen years of age. Hence, the wisest states, the most religious churches, and most Christian governments, have employed their chief and principal care upon children and youth. *Train up a child in the way wherein he should go, and when he becomes old he will not depart from it.*

The second fountain and cause of dishonesty is avarice or covetousness. The influence of this vice hurries many persons into a thousand wicked and unrighteous practices. This unbounded desire of getting cannot be removed but by dishonest gratifications. Hence people are tempted to take what is not their due, or withhold what is due to others. They pursue dishonest measures to pinch from, or over-reach those with whom they deal. It is to this horrid root of bitterness, the false balance and deceitful beam owe their invention. Hence the seller puts off damaged wares for good, and the buyer, false money or counterfeited currency. This avaricious temper disposes the tradesman to work up base materials in a sligh-
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manner,

manner, and to impose upon the ignorance and credulity of his employer. This causes one to take the advantage of the present necessity of another, and obliges him either to dispose of, or purchase at an improper value. Covetousness tempts persons to prevaricate, truckle, flatter and lie in their dealings; to break their promises, and delay their payments to their customers or creditors. The same dishonest humour makes men bring in extortionate bills, and overcharge for their services. What a world of iniquity, dishonesty and injustice flow from this awful source! Here we see the propriety of the frequent cautions we have from Christianity, *to beware of covetousness*.

A *third* fountain of dishonesty originates in luxury and extravagance. When persons live above their income, and their expences exceed their circumstances; when they attempt to shine at home and abroad in pomp and equipage, with those of better business and superior fortunes: What can be the consequence? Bankruptcy or dishonesty must be the necessary issue. From hence they borrow without designs of payment, and run into debt without a rational prospect of discharging it. Many support their prodigality at the expence of their creditors, and the ruin of their families. This vice drives some to gaming, and other practices of bad report, with a view of hasty and dishonest gains; and thus it becomes an awful source of dishonour, wretchedness, and misery.

Fourthly, Another fountain of dishonesty I shall mention, is pride and selfishness. These had a deep share in the first transgression, and probably had great influence in the fall both of angels and men. These produce dishonesty towards our brethren of mankind of every sort; but more especially in regard to their persons and reputation. Pride tempts men to refuse due respect to their superiors, to be haughty to their equals, and to show a
supercilious

supercilious contempt of their inferiors.—Selfishness cannot bear the preference of another; it grows uneasy, and swells into dissatisfaction at his advancement or prosperity. It is hard to treat a proud and selfish man with reverence, submission and obeisance. When you are obliged to bow and cringe before him, and bite the lip, it is not in nature or grace not to despise him in your inmost soul.

It is pride also that raises envy at the growing fame of a neighbour, and induces to the spreading abroad of dishonourable things to his disadvantage. It takes an ill-natured satisfaction in seeing him mortified or brought down. Pride and selfishness often produce a malicious and revengeful temper, which is frequently an origin of much dishonesty. Malice and revenge form a detestable character, and near a-kin to hell. It is impossible, without horror, to relate the dreadful extremes these passions will carry persons to in whom they prevail. They often sicken at nothing, however dishonourable, shocking, and inhumane, for their gratification. They direct to slandering, backbiting, stabbing another's good name. They destroy the peace of neighbourhoods, dissolve the bonds of friendship, break asunder the ties of blood and affinity, scatter abroad firebrands, arrows and death, and work dishonesty with greediness, and feel the tormenting pleasure which the damned enjoy. Let some unhappy occasion open this source of ill, immediately all the faults, infirmities, and blemishes of a worthy and good character, will be proclaimed and aggravated; his best, most Christian and beneficent actions, will be misrepresented and debased; confidences disregarded; secrets blazed and published; and the whole course of nature set on fire. Behold dishonesty, what a horrid spectre! It creates damnation

nation in the soul, and turns earth into hell. Let us quit the odious and awful object, and proceed,

Secondly, To bring forward some considerations and motives to induce us to be conscientiously honest in all our employments, business and conversation with our fellow men.

Can we now think a dishonest thought, contrive a dishonest scheme, or be guilty of a dishonest action? Consider the right every man has to enjoy his own, by the laws of nature, reason, religion and society, in respect to his person, property, and character. These blessings are the benefactions of heaven to all. Their right to the undisturbed possession of them is founded upon the grant of the God of nature and of grace. To hesitate about the title of the lawful owner's quiet enjoyment of them, is to dispute the right of the supreme and independent proprietor, the Lord Almighty. Therefore, all fraudulent and dishonest practices, from the evil thought in the mind to the highest acts of outrageous violence, are a reversion of the orders of heaven, a condemnation of equity and wisdom, and an invasion of the throne of God. It is, as a poet inimitably expresses himself in another case, to

"Snatch from his hands the balance and the rod,

"Rejudge his justice, be the God of God."

Will the Almighty Sovereign see his creatures and his children rifled of their immunities and blessings, which his goodness and bounty hath conferred upon them, and not conceive resentment? Will he not whet his glittering sword, and his hand lay hold on vengeance? Let all dishonest persons tremble; the eternal God will assert his own prerogative, and maintain the sacred rights of honesty.

Further consider, sincerity and honesty are the very bonds which hold society together. The religious obser-

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vation of these virtues are the great means to advance its real interests. From whence it is plain, that the neglect or disuse of them must destroy the advantages of society, and threaten its very existence. A dishonest person is a public nuisance, and may be viewed as a common enemy to mankind. None are safe from injuries who have any commerce or dealings with him. Can there be such monsters in nature as professing Christians, and yet dishonest men? They sap the foundations of church and state, and are more dangerous than open and declared foes. An avowed enemy may be an honest man, but a deceitful friend cannot. What society, either civil or religious, can be secure, where dissingenuity and dishonesty are practised by its members? Can we hold such in estimation, or think favourably of them? How contrary is dishonesty to the treatment we wish and expect from mankind? We resent it when done to ourselves; how should we avoid it in all our traffick with others? Let us never, in any instance, act a dishonest part, or be guilty of a conduct contrary to humanity, reason, and Christianity.

Lastly, Consider the practice of dishonesty is prohibited in a thousand instances in the word of God. The Divine wrath is revealed against it, both in his declarations, and in many examples recorded in the sacred history. *That which is altogether just shalt thou follow*, saith the Lord thy God, *Ye shall not steal nor deal falsely, nor lie one to another. Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour nor rob him. The wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning. Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in weight, or in measure. A just balance and just weights shall ye have.* The royal preacher informs us, *That an unjust weight is an abomination to the Lord. Wo to him*, saith the Most High by the prophet, *who buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers*

chambers by wrong; who useth his neighbour's service without wages, and giveth him not for his work. What doth the Lord say to Christians, by the Apostle James, of dishonest gains? Your gold and silver is cankered, and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat up your flesh as fire. Ye have heaped up treasure together for the last days. Behold the hire of the labourers which have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth, and the cries of them which have reaped, are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.

Read the vengeance of heaven against dishonest men. Consider the end of Balaam, who loved the wages of unrighteousness. Behold the fate of an oppressive and dishonest Pharaoh. What insincerity, forfeiture of honour, breach of promises, and cruelty formed his character! And how was his kingdom deluged in blood by the slaying of the first-born; and himself and his whole host overwhelmed in the Red Sea! View the dogs licking the blood of Ahab, in the very place where he shed innocent blood, that he might dishonestly possess himself of his neighbour's vineyard. But there would be no end of retailing horrid instances of this kind.

Let us turn our eyes to our Divine Master upon this head, contemplate his conduct, and the design of the holy religion he instituted. Plain and solemn are his commands upon the mount, as also on other occasions, *that honesty be practised between man and man.* He has given us an admirable, easy and universal rule of honesty, in that ever-memorable and golden maxim, *All things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them, for this is the law and the prophets.* How beautiful, excellent and obvious to application is this divine direction! What a system of Christianity is here! And whole codes of morality cannot express more. Do
unto

unto all as ye would desire they should do unto you, were you in their circumstances, and they in your's, then you will be honest men and good Christians. Dreadful is the curse which Jesus pronounces upon the dishonest religionists of his day. *Wo unto you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for ye pay tithes of mint and annise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith!* that is, ye are neither charitable, honest, nor true believers. Your neglecting honesty towards your fellow-creatures under the specious pretences of high religion, much devotion, and long prayers, will only bring down more awful vengeance upon your devoted heads. *God hates robbery and injustice;* he abhors dishonesty, *even for burnt-offerings.* The covetous and extortionate are shut out of heaven, and the unjust and dishonest of every complexion shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

Consider the sweet, the blessed, and perfect example of Jesus, the mighty Lord and Saviour of the world. Behold him submitting to virtuous honesty—rendering to all their dues—tribute to whom tribute was due—custom to whom custom—fear to whom fear; and universal love and benevolence to all mankind. He rendered tribute to Cæsar, subjected himself in all duty to his earthly parents, loved his brethren, and practised, in all things, the most unstained honesty and perfect righteousness.

The great design and tendency of the gospel is to inspire us with an inviolable attachment to piety, morality, and the most exalted honesty. Does not the grace of God, which hath appeared unto all men, teach us to deny all ungodliness, and every worldly lust, and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present evil world? Can they pretend to be Christians, to be followers of the pure and holy Jesus, and form expectations of the celestial

stia rewards, who live in deceit and insincerity, and practise injustice and dishonesty? Dishonest men are a blemish to Christianity, and a disgrace to our holy religion.

Now, from the considerations and motives laid before us, let us all be exhorted, my dear brethren, to be persons of integrity, uprightness, and strict justice. Let us be honest men—let us keep consciences void of offence towards God and man—let us have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly. *Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.*

Persons are often censured in our churches for drunkenness, fornication, &c. but who is ever censured for dishonesty, a crime of a deeper dye? Men may be guilty of a thousand things which are not fair and upright, and no notice taken of them.—Yea, they may deceive their neighbour—impose upon him—prove false to their word—break their promises—withhold his dues, and not only pass uncensured, but be charitably deemed by many as pretty good Christians, though none will trust them as strictly honest. Let us abhor all mean, low and double dealings: Keep yourselves far removed from such evil practices. Attend to honourable industry; be diligent in your callings and occupations, but make not haste to be rich. Let us be careful to keep our children employed, and our youth to business. I would be far from debarring youth from just and rational recreations. But there is a wide difference between proper recreations, and sauntering, mischievous idleness.—Remember, industry prevents

prevents much vice; is a security to good morals, and the hand-maid of religion.

Let us beware of avarice in ourselves, and guard all under our care, whether children, apprentices or others, from evil company—from luxury, pride and extravagance as far as in our power. What fills our gaols, but laziness, folly, an aversion from work, extravagance, prodigality and drunken bargains? The truly unfortunate, the frugal and industrious, who arise not above their business, and yet by adverse providences are carried to those apartments of calamity, are very few. What causes the massy chains to clank in our gloomy dungeons, but horrid dishonesty?—I forbear the pursuit of the rising awful idea.—Where can I find a pause in this exuberant theme?—I must break off, though to finish the subject is impossible. Indulge me to leave it in the sententious counsel of the Prophet. And Oh! that it might be indelibly written as with the point of a diamond upon each of your hearts! *Do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.*

May this counsel form our character, and evidence our hopes of glory. Amen.

SERMON XXVII*.

THE REWARD OF INIQUITY.

BY

UZAL OGDEN, M.A.

Rector of Trinity Church, in Newark, New-Jersey.

ON this solemn occasion, I fully expected, and hoped, that my reverend and very worthy brother, the minister of this church, would, from this place, have addressed you; his necessary absence, however, from town, almost the whole of this week, and other circumstances, prevented him from the discharge of that sacred service, which has devolved on me. Though, through my absence also from this place, but a few hours have elapsed since I was requested thus to appear before you, a sense of duty would not suffer me to decline the request, even under the disadvantages which attend so sudden

* Delivered at Newark, in the new Presbyterian Church, May 6. 1791, at the execution of WILLIAM JONES, for the murder of SAMUEL SHOTWELL.

den a notice to discharge so important an office. It is not the applause of men I covet; and while I solicit the candour of this large and respectable audience, I assure them that I shall not attempt to deliver an elaborate discourse; but beg leave to lay before them a few serious facts and observations, which may have a tendency to cause the present solemnity to have its desired effect.

The words of sacred writ which occur to me as pertinent to this occasion, you will find in the ninth chapter of the book of Genesis at the 6th verse. *Who so sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed.*

Without any further observations, I shall,

- I. Consider the nature of murder.
- II. Attend to some of its causes.
- III. Notice the punishment due to murder.
- IV. Regard the ends of this punishment.

First, I am to attend to the nature of murder.

It is a crime, it may be observed, which, with us, nothing can excuse. If a man is injured in his property, reputation or person, the law of this land of freedom and good government, will afford him redress.

Murder is expressly forbidden by the laws of God and man. The Almighty, in great mercy, hath guarded the lives of men, the works of his hands, by the most positive injunctions. In Exodus xx. 13. we thus read, *Thou shalt not kill*; and our Saviour sanctions this divine authority by repeating it, Matt. xix. 18. *Thou shalt do no murder; thou shalt not commit adultery, &c.* The man, says God, who shall murder his brother shall be punished. *At the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man.* And, to name no more places, from the great number which might be cited, in the words of our text,

God, very particularly, forbids this crime under the pain of death: *Who so sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed.* It is worthy of remark, that still further to prevent the perpetration of this sin, under the Mosaic dispensation, even the beast that killed a man was to be put to death; and of those animals which it was lawful for men to eat, they were prohibited to eat the blood, because it was the life of them.

Murder, suffer it further to be observed, is an offence of great magnitude against both God and man; it bids defiance to all authority, human and divine. In the words following the text, a reason is given why this crime should not be committed; *for, in the image of God made he man.* Man is not only the creature of God, but the only being on earth upon which he instamped his heavenly image. To destroy this image from the earth, is to take from it every thing that is godly. This must be an heinous offence: It is a manifest opposition to the will of heaven; and though God says, *I have made man for my glory*, the murderer, by his conduct, declares, (with regard to one individual at least), man shall not exist: God shall not be glorified by him! Against society or the state, the offence is great. A state is composed of individuals; and unjustly to take away the life of an individual, is a sort of treason against the community at large; it is an attack on the commonwealth, and it deprives the state, for ever, of a fellow-citizen; of all his time, talents and usefulness, and, therefore, in some degree, lessens its power and respectability. Against a family, the evil is often more sensibly felt, and cannot be compensated. Who, but God, can restore to the aged father and mother, the son of their love? or to the affectionate wife, the companion of her bosom? or to the helpless children, their father, their counsellor and support?

With

With respect to the party murdered, how enormous is the crime! It robs him of the most valuable thing on earth, life; precipitates him, prepared or unprepared, into the world of spirits; for ever fixes the state of his soul, and to him the most serious consequence may be, death eternal!

Under this head, I shall only further notice, that such is the crime of murder, that human nature revolts at the very idea of it; that, in the Divine esteem, it may be committed in thought as well as by deed; and that, even by the laws of our land, it may be perpetrated, when some may flatter themselves, though their murderous deed shall be proved, yet, by the law, they cannot be convicted. It is a circumstance that merits attention, (as appeared on the trial of the unhappy culprit present), that personal, positive testimony of one or more witnesses is not necessary to ground the charge of murder. If such evidence was necessary, as was justly remarked by one of the counsel in behalf of the State, whose life would be safe? for murder is generally committed in secrecy.—Circumstances alone, when clear and strong, are sufficient to convict of this offence; particularly, as the honourable court observed, should a person be found to have suddenly expired in a room, and, at that instant should a man issue from thence with a sword reeking with blood, this circumstance would be sufficient to affix on him the charge of murder. I mention this to apprise the ignorant and vicious of a snare they may fall into, while insensible of danger!

As the crime of murder is thus of great magnitude, and so abhorrent to God and man, it may not be unuseful, as I purposed,

To attend to some of the causes of this sin.

This, I apprehend, is seldom or never committed, till men are greatly depraved; till all sense of moral goodness is almost totally effaced; until vice in them reigns predominant; for such is the deformity of vice in general, that the person not grown grey in iniquity, shudders at the very thought of committing it.

But how does the repeated practice of evil obliterate from the mind every virtuous sentiment, and render man, in point of moral goodness, but little superior, perhaps, to the infernal spirits! Our Saviour regards incorrigible sinners to be the children of their father the devil, whose works they will do!

Among the vices which the soonest, and which most effectually debase and pollute human nature, we may, perhaps, number profane swearing and drunkenness, which are often occasioned through a neglect of private and public devotion, and evil company.

When men are so degraded, that they fear not God, nor regard man, the immediate causes of murder in general are, I conceive, the love of money, the expectation of some earthly good, or the spirit of revenge.

But before the murderer commits the awful deed, would he pause a moment, and consider that the eye of God at least is upon him; that, through the justice of Divine Providence, the murderer, even in this world, seldom escapes with impunity; and would he consider also, the present punishment only that awaits his guilt, how would he flee from the commission of so atrocious a deed?

This leads me, next, to pay attention to the punishment of murder.

By the laws of God and man, the life of the murderer is required. No tears, no prayers, no penitence, no intercession of others, nor any less punishment than death,

death, can be accepted. *Whoſo ſheddeth man's blood, by man ſhall his blood be ſhed!*—*He that ſmitteth a man, ſo that he die,* ſays the Divine word, *ſhall ſurely be put to death!*—*The murderer ſhall ſurely be put to death!*—*Ye ſhall take no ſatisfaction for the life of a murderer.*—*If, in enmity, a man ſmitteth another with his hand that he dieth, he ſhall ſurely be put to death; for he is a murderer.* *If a man hate his neighbour, and lie in wait for him, and ſmite him mortally that he die, thine eye ſhall not pity him; but thou ſhalt put away the guilt of innocent blood!*—And how many threatenings hath God denounced againſt the murderer? *The Lord, ſays David, will abhor the bloody man! Bloody men ſhall not live out half their days.* And murderers are numbered among thoſe finners, who *ſhall have their part in that lake of fire and brimſtone, which burneth for ever and ever!*

Their puniſhment of temporal death, is truly awful. To be expoſed to public ſhame!—to be torn from mother, brother, ſiſter, every friend,—from every earthly good! to be cut off, as in the preſent inſtance, in the flower of youth*! to go down with infamy to the grave, as a peſt to ſociety—as one unworthy of life,—how wretched the ſtate! Haraſſed too by the terrors of a guilty conſcience, from which he cannot flee; and, unleſs pardoned by God, through the merits of Chriſt, to be covered with everlaſting infamy; eternally to endure the anguiſh of remorse, and all the effects of the Divine diſpleaſure; to ſuſtain all the inconceivable miſeries of eternal condemnation—how great the wo—how inſupportable the thought! But ſuch is juſtly the doom of the impenitent murderer!

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But,

* The culprit was in the twenty-ſeventh year of his age.

But is it enquired, Wherefore is he now punished?

I shall, in the first place, attend to the answer.

Certainly he is not here punished to gratify a spirit of malice or revenge! He is not held up as a spectacle of misery, that by men he may suffer insult, nor that they may rejoice in his misery! Far from it!—But to impress on the minds of men a sense of the malignity of the crime of murder; to deter them from the commission of a deed so horrid; and therefore the punishment is inflicted in the most public manner, *That all Israel* (that every person in the State) *may bear and fear, and do not such wickedness!* The murderer is also punished, that the community may retain its dignity, and escape the vengeance of God. *Blood, we read, defileth the land; and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it.* For the honour, therefore, of our country and its laws; for the good and safety of the commonwealth; and to avoid the frowns of a righteous and holy God, the awful sentence is executed; the sacrifice cannot be dispensed with; and, indeed, not to punish murder when in our power, is in some degree tacitly to approve of the crime, and to become partakers of the guilt!

Having thus, in a very summary way, noticed the crime of murder, some of the causes of it, its punishment, and the ends of this punishment, I shall proceed to improve the subject.

1. How sensibly are we convinced by every crime, but especially by that of murder, of the depravity of human nature!—And how soon was this offence committed after the fall of man!—If human nature is thus depraved, while we perceive the necessity of the holy religion of Jesus; admire its benign intention, which is to prevent every crime; to restore men to purity, and

to reconcile them to God—how grateful should we be for this dispensation of mercy; and what an holy abhorrence should be ours of those men, or those sentiments, which would subvert the Christian religion, and introduce Deism, or licentious principles, in its stead!

2. It appears, from what hath been said, how necessary it is, if men regard their reputation, their present and future happiness, to revere the precepts of Christianity; and especially to avoid the indulgence of anger and drunkenness; which are among those evils which lead to the perpetration of murder! How frequently and expressly are these sins forbidden? *Wo unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue till night until wine enflame them!* We are assured that the drunkard shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven. *And, says Solomon, drunkenness, at the last, biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.* It deserves attention, that the unhappy effects of this vice were flagrantly manifest in these two causes, tried here so lately, on indictments for murder. The two unfortunate men who died, were intoxicated in death; the man convicted of man-slaughter, was also intoxicated when he committed the fact; and the person who is now condemned for murder, was much addicted to liquor, and had spent the night in revelling that preceded the day in which he stained his hands with blood!

With respect to anger. Is it not enjoined, that *Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart: Vengeance is mine and I will repay, saith the Lord.* We are exhorted to *put away all bitterness, anger and malice, to render not evil for evil; but to love even our enemies.* *And anger, saith the wise man, resteth in the bosom of fools.*

3. If parents regard the prosperity of their children, how should they teach them the principles of our holy

religion; admonish them to avoid every vice; excite them by precept and example, to regard every duty; *to remember their Creator in the days of their youth!* Indeed, will not a different conduct be attended, in all probability, with the most unhappy consequences, not only to the public in general, but to themselves in particular; and have they not just reason to fear the vengeance of Heaven for the neglect of parental duty? Was not the house of Eli judged for ever, because his children made themselves vile, and he restrained them not?

4. How thankful to Heaven should be those parents, whose children are preserved from the power of vice; who do honour to religion, and are a blessing to their country! How grateful, indeed, should be all who are kept from presumptuous sins? But should we not remember, that the wages of every sin, unrepented of, will be death eternal!

5. How should impious youth be warned by this unhappy example of evil, without delay, to forsake their sins, and to flee the wrath of God to come! Had this unfortunate man revered the dictates of reason and religion; had the pious admonitions of his mother been properly regarded, might he not have been ornamental to human nature and to religion; been a useful member of society; borne the name of his father with reputation; been *a crown of rejoicing* to his widowed, aged mother; supported her feeble steps in the decline of life; lived in happiness, and died in honour!—But, ah! through the indulgence of vice, through the forgetfulness of his God, how awfully the reverse!

Will you not, O youth! turn from his example in righteous indignation!—What would tempt you to take his place, to endure his punishment?—Let his folly, then, teach you wisdom; his indiscretion, inspire you with

prudence!—Shun the fatal rock on which he split to his destruction!—For the honour of Christianity;—for the reputation and prosperity of the State, and as you regard your own reputation and happiness in this world, and in the next; and for the consolation of your parents also, be exhorted, be entreated, to forsake the thorny way of vice, and to tread the peaceful, happy path of virtue!

6. Turn your eyes, my brethren, and behold a moment the weeping, the disconsolate mother! Pity her wo! Sympathize with her in her distress! Despise her not; add not to her grief.

I have, lastly, to address a few words to you, Sir, who are now the victim of justice!—Unhappy man!—For you we feel; for you we mourn!—Through the prevalence of vice, your heart became estranged from God! In sickness, you formed resolutions of amendment; but, I fear, in your own strength; for they *vanished like the morning cloud or early dew*. Thus you became more and more hardened in iniquity? God, in just displeasure, seemed almost totally to have forsaken you! Not having his fear before you eyes, by an indulgence of the passion of anger and revenge, you have murdered an inoffensive, harmless neighbour!—You say, that you did not mean to take his life; that you had not murder in your heart! But, at least, was not your conduct towards him lawless, cruel, barbarous! In the estimation of God and man, it was murderous!—You honestly, however, confess the crime! You wish sinners may take warning by your example! You own the justice of your sentence! You are now to expiate your offence, agreeably to the express command of God, with your blood!—While the hand of justice is raised for execution, we lament your fate; we deplore your wretchedness!—Nothing consoles

us but your penitence!—You say, you have spread your sins before God! That you heartily bewail them! That your only refuge is in the blood of Christ! That God hath spoken peace to your soul! That you believe your pardon is sealed in heaven! That your whole trust is in the mercy of God, through Christ! That you are resigned to your fate, and that you will leave the world with assured hopes of acceptance with God, through the righteousness of the merciful Saviour!

We hope your expectations of heaven are rational, scriptural! But, be not deceived! The adversary of souls is subtle! If you die in delusion, you are lost for ever; must endure the miseries of eternal condemnation!

But if your hopes of salvation are just, how great and happy will be your change in a few moments! Bonds you will exchange for heavenly freedom! Infamy for honour! Pain for pleasure! Death for life! You will add to the trophies of Divine grace. With the murderous Manassah, and other finners, you will join in the praises of redeeming love!

You certainly have no reason to despair of the mercy of heaven! *Christ came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance! The broken and contrite heart will not be despised by the God of compassion!—Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted!* And if even some of the murderers of Christ embraced the faith, and found mercy, wherefore should you despair of salvation? For them Christ prayed; because with God there is mercy and plenteousness of redemption!

To God's tender mercy, through Christ, we commit you; and in your behalf, we humbly address the throne of grace!

SERMON XXVIII.

TRUST IN GOD.

BY

JOHN WITHERSPOON, D. D. L. L. D.

Col. N. C. P.

ISAIAH I. 10.

Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.

IT is said of every real believer, that he walks by faith and not by sight. If this is true, it will follow, that his faith must be exposed to a variety of trials, while he continues in a world of sense. These trials arise from the state of his own mind—from his outward condition—from the state of the world with which he stands connected, and from the mutual influence of all these, one upon another. From this situation it is easy to see, that there are few duties, for the exercise of which a good

good man will have greater or more frequent occasion, than that of trust and reliance upon God. Trust is the duty and the refuge of the needy—of the dependent—of the weak—the timorous, and the distressed. How many are included under one or more of these characters; or rather, who is it that can say he is altogether excluded?

Agreeably to this, we need but open the sacred volume; to perceive how frequent the exhortations are to trust in God, and how many views are given us of his power, wisdom, mercy and faithfulness, to encourage us to an unshaken reliance. At the same time, I am sorry to say, that there are few duties which are more imperfectly understood by many professing Christians. Even pious persons often sin both on the right hand and on the left, that is to say, both by diffidence and presumption. I have, therefore, laid hold of this opportunity, and made choice of this passage of Scripture, in order to open and illustrate a little this important duty of a servant of God. How seasonable it is you will easily perceive, for in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper we have set before us Christ Jesus, the unspeakable gift of God—the great pledge of his love, and the great foundation of our reliance upon him, not only for his saving mercy in general, but for every necessary blessing in our way to eternal rest.

This passage of Scripture is also well suited to the subject. It was spoken to the Jews in a lax and dissolute age, when many had turned their backs upon the service of God—had deserted his ordinances, and despised his servants, which is always an occasion both of affliction and temptation to his own children. This appears from the first words of the chapter. *For thus saith the Lord, Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, whom I have put away? and which of my creditors is it to whom*

I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities you have sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away. As also from the 3d and 4th verses: I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering. The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary.

In discoursing further on this subject, it is proposed, through the assistance of Divine grace,

I. To open a little the character and state of those who are called upon, and exhorted to trust in the name of the Lord.

II. To explain the duty of trust, and point out the foundation of it.

III. To apply the subject for your instruction and comfort.

In the *first* place, then, I am to open a little the character and state of those who are here called upon, and exhorted to trust in the name of the Lord.

Their description is as follows: *Who is among you that feareth the Lord, and obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay himself upon his God.* It will help us to enter into the spirit and meaning of the Prophet's words, if we keep in view the state of the Jewish church, hinted at a little ago, *Who is among you*; that is, if there is one or more,—if there is a small select number in the midst of general corruption and depravity, who have kept their garments unpolluted, though iniquity abounds, and the love of many waxeth cold, *that feareth the Lord?* You know it is common in Scripture to describe religion in general by some particular leading branch of it. The fear of God is often made use of for this purpose, as in that passage, there shall be no want to them

them that *fear him*. It may, therefore, signify those who have a sincere and unfeigned regard to the commandments of God, and have chosen him as their portion and hope. Those who desire and deserve to be distinguished from the profane despiser,—the secure formalist, or the disguised hypocrite. Those, in a word, who are, and who desire to appear, to use the strong language of Scripture, upon the Lord's side in every struggle, and who resolve with Joshua, that whatever others do, for their part they will serve the Lord.

But I cannot help thinking, we may also, with great safety, explain the words in a closer and stricter sense, and suppose, that by fearing the Lord, is to be understood a due reverence for his infinite majesty, a humble veneration for his sacred authority. This is a most excellent fence or guard to the conscience in an evil time, and a noble preservative from the spreading infection and insinuating poison of prevailing or fashionable sins. It is also the usual character of a dissolute age to have cast off fear, to treat the most sacred things with scorn, and to look upon that holy solicitude to avoid sin, which appears in the carriage and language of a child of God, as a mark of meanness or weakness of mind. In such an age, one who fears God is well described by the prophet Isaiah, *But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.*

The next part of the character is, *and obeyeth the voice of his servant*; that is to say, is willing to hearken to the message of God by the mouth of his servants. The words of the text, no doubt, may be considered as primarily referring to the inspired Prophets, who bore an immediate commission, miraculously attested from God. Many, even of these, were set at nought, their message derided, and their persons insulted, when they attempted to stem the tide

tide of prevailing vice, or boldly denounced the Divine vengeance against high-handed sinners. But the sincerely pious obeyed their voice. I shall make no scruple to apply this to ourselves, and the present age. Our blessed Redeemer hath established in his church a standing ministry, and the regular administration of ordinances. And though we have this treasure in earthen vessels, yet in no other way doth he now communicate his will, and vouchsafe his presence to his people, but by the reading and hearing of his word, and attendance upon his instituted worship. It will, no doubt, therefore be a part of the character of a good man, that he will love the ordinances, and obey the voice of the servants of God; that he will consider him who hath sent them, and receive instruction, not as the word of man, but as it is in deed and in truth the word of God.

On the other hand, when iniquity prevails, when irreligion and profaneness lift up their heads, one of the most usual concomitants, and one of the surest proofs of it is, a neglect of ordinances, and contempt of those who are concerned in their administration: How far this is at present the case, I leave to yourselves to judge. While I speak this, my brethren, I do by no means desire to see an ignorant people distracted by the gloomy terrors of superstition, or led blindfold by the enchanted cord of implicit faith. But sure I am, there is an extreme on either hand, and those who truly fear the Lord, will honour the persons, and obey the voice of such as plead his cause and speak in his name. You may rest assured, that though they neither deserve nor claim any authority on their own account, yet so long as they stand in the Divine councils, and speak the Divine word, their message will be attended with this awful sanction, *He that despiseth you, despiseth*

despise me, and he that despise me, despise him that sent me.

The last part of the character here drawn, which lays the foundation for the subsequent direction is, *that walketh in darkness, and hath no light*. Darkness and light, besides their literal, have often a metaphorical sense in Scripture. They are, indeed, used with a good deal of latitude and variety. But I think their metaphorical signification may be reduced to these two general heads. 1. Sometimes light signifies knowledge, and darkness signifies ignorance,—as in Eph. v. 8. *Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord; walk as children of light*. Acts xxvi. 18. *To turn them from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God*. Job xxxvii. 19. *Teach us what we shall say unto him; for we cannot order our speech by reason of darkness*. 2. Sometimes darkness signifies distress or trouble, and the correspondent signification of light is deliverance and joy, as 2 Sam. xxii. 28, 29. *And the afflicted people thou wilt save; but thine eyes are upon the haughty, that thou mayest bring them down; for thou art my lamp, O Lord; and the Lord will lighten my darkness*. Job xix. 8. *He hath fenced up my way that I cannot pass; he hath put darkness in my paths*. Ps. xcvi. 11. *Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart*. Esther viii. 16. *And the Jews had light and gladness, and joy and honour*.

None of these senses is to be excluded in the passage before us. Believers may walk in darkness, when ignorant or uncertain as to what nearly concerns them, as well as under distress and trouble. They have also a mutual influence upon, produce, and are produced by one another. For illustrating this a little more particularly, observe, that a good man may walk in darkness. 1. When he is in doubt or uncertainty as to his interest in the Divine

vine favour. 2. When he is under the pressure of outward calamity. 3. When the state of the church is such, that he cannot understand or explain, in a satisfying manner, the course of Divine providence. These particulars I have it not in view to enlarge much upon, but only to explain them so far as is necessary to lay a foundation for what shall be afterwards offered on the duty to trust in God.

1. Then, a good man may walk in darkness when he is in doubt or uncertainty as to his interest in the Divine favour. I apprehend that some measure of hope in God's mercy is essential to true piety, and not only the right, but the possession of every child of God. Faith and despair are beyond all question inconsistent. Faith and hope are inseparable. Yet certainly the excellent ones of the earth may be sometimes involved in great perplexity and doubt. This is plain from scripture examples, from daily experience, and from the nature and reason of the thing. How violent a struggle do we often find the Psalmist David in, between hope and fear? *O my God, my soul is cast down in me; therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar.* How many do we see every day under a spirit of bondage, who, though they still cleave to God as their portion, yet are often full of fears, and seldom dare confidently affirm their interest in, or relation to him. And indeed how can it be otherwise? While we are here, our sanctification is but imperfect; and, alas! with regard to many, it is often hard to determine, whether we should not write upon it, *Mene tekél*, as essentially defective.

Sin separates between God and his people, and causes him to hide his face from them. Nay, sometimes, though there be no particular or provoking crime, as the cause

of his controversy with them, he may withdraw from them the light of his countenance, to exercise their vigilance, or to try their patience. I know, my brethren, that the distress of serious souls, when mourning after an absent or an angry God, crying to him in secret, and following hard after him in his ordinances, is by many treated with the highest degree of contempt. But surely, if peace of mind from a well-founded hope of the Divine favour, is the greatest of all present blessings; and if this, from the variableness of our own conduct, is sometimes more, sometimes less strong, and sometimes wholly suspended; when this last is the case, it must occasion inexpressible concern, and there can be no greater evidence of irreligion and impiety than to call it in question.

2. A good man may walk in darkness when under the pressure of outward calamity. This, in a real believer, is never wholly separated from the former. Even in itself, indeed, no affliction for the present is joyous but grievous. The disorders of this feeble frame, poverty, and straitness of provision, unjust slander and reproach, must be deeply and sensibly felt by every good man, even as he is a man. To this may be added, the loss of relations, and concerns for the sufferings of others of every kind, which is always most distressing to the best and tenderest spirits. But outward calamities by those that fear God, are felt most sensibly when they are considered as the rod of his anger, and bring sin to remembrance. When he visits his own children with any of his sore judgments: When he follows them with breach upon breach, they are ready to say, *Surely he is setting me up as a mark for his arrows, he is counting me his enemy.*—They are often at a loss to understand the cause of his controversy with them; and they also find it often extremely difficult to bring their minds to a patient and
submissive

submissive resignation to his holy will. To those who know their duty, and desire, through Divine grace, to comply with it, it is no small difficulty to be obliged to struggle with a rising and rebellious heart within, as well as suffering from without, and to be alternately calling in question, the certainty either of the love of God to them, or of their love to him.

3. A good man may sometimes walk in darkness from the aspect of Providence, and the state of the Redeemer's kingdom. The works of God are sought out of them who have pleasure in them. But when they are not able to penetrate the depths of the Divine counsels, this becomes often a source both of distress and temptation. When wicked men are suffered to prosper at their will ; —when the good are oppressed by the power and tyranny, or persecuted by the malice of their enemies ; —when the most generous attempts for the revival of truth and righteousness are rendered abortive ; —when the professing servants of God are divided into parties, or marshalled under names, and their zeal made to spend itself in unnecessary, sinful and hurtful contentions ; —when offences come, and those of the highest profession or attainments are suffered to fall into gross crimes, by which the mouths of enemies are opened to blasphemy ; then may, and must we adopt the words of the Psalmist, —Ps. lxxiii. 10.—14. *Therefore, his people return thither ; and waters of a full cup are wrung out unto them : And they say, how doth God know ? and is there knowledge in the Most High ? Behold, these are the ungodly who prosper in the world ; they increase in riches. Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning.*

I proceed now to the *second* and chief thing proposed from this passage, which was to explain the duty of trust in God, and to point out its foundation.

Trust, in the most general view we can take of it, may be thus explained. It is a reliance or confidence in God, that however discouraging appearances may be for the present time, yet, by his power and wisdom, our desires and expectation shall take place, whether as to deliverance from trouble, or the obtaining of future blessings. When we can attain this happy frame of spirit, it is an inconceivable relief and ease to the mind under suffering, and is excellently expressed by the Psalmist,—Ps. lv. 22. *Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee, he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.* Let us then endeavour to explain the grounds of this as distinctly as possible. And God grant that it may be done not only in a clear, but in a solid and satisfying manner, so as to assist you in the practice of real and vital religion.

I have already said, that our expectation is from the power and wisdom of God. May we then reasonably expect, is it our duty to believe, that we shall receive all that we desire, and that is within the reach of Divine power and wisdom? These have no bounds at all. We know that nothing is too hard for the Almighty. He doth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth. This suggests to us, that there is something more necessary, in order to lay a proper foundation for trust, *viz.* his goodness to make our expectation probable, and his promise to make it certain. Even created beings can often do what they will not. This holds particularly with regard to God, whose power is directed in its exercise by his goodness, and limited by his wisdom. His goodness, in general, encourages us to go to him with a peradventure, or who can tell whether

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he may not be gracious? But in order to make our trust both distinct and strong, we must go to his promise, *for he is faithful and keepeth covenant and truth for ever*. Trust then, my brethren, rests ultimately on the promise. It must be precisely commensurate, or of the same extent with the promises. Whoever doubts or calls in question the certainty of what God hath promised, is chargeable with distrust; and whoever expects to receive, in kind or degree, more than he has promised, is so far guilty of presumption. This is the general rule, and I think it carries such evidence with it, that every one must be sensible it is just, who hath heard it with any measure of attention.

But the great difficulty yet remains, which is, to apply this rule to the various cares that occur in the spiritual life, and to tell any particular person what it is his duty firmly to believe, and hope he shall receive from God, and what it would be presumptuous and simple in him to fix his expectation on. This is plainly of the greater importance, that the more particular our trust is, as to the object of desire, it is the more powerful a support to the mind. At the same time it frequently happens, that the more particularly our desires are formed, the foundation of our hope appears the more uncertain and questionable. On this account you may observe, that it is of the greatest moment to understand the nature and tenor of the promises; or rather, indeed, to explain the foundation of trust, and to explain the nature and tenor of the promises, is one and the same thing.

For this end, it may be proper to distinguish the promises of God, as to futurity, into two heads, *absolute* and *conditional*. By absolute promises, in this place, I understand only those that are so in the most unlimited sense, that is to say, revealed as a part of the fixed plan of Pro-

vidence, suspended on no terms but what all, of every character, may expect will certainly come to pass. Such are the promises after the flood, *that summer and winter, seed-time and harvest, should not fail*;—the coming of Christ in the flesh at the fulness of time, to the ancient Patriarchs, and to us;—the downfall of Antichrist;—the preservation of a church on earth, let its enemies be or do what they will;—the calling of God's ancient people the Jews, and the coming of Christ to judge the world at the last day. These are all called promises in Scripture, and so far as they can be of any use to the people of God, either for direction in duty, or restraint from sin, or consolation under trial, they are to be depended on, in the most absolute manner, for they rest upon the certainty of the Holy Scriptures, and the truth of the unchangeable God, who is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent.

S E R.

SERMON XXIX.

TRUST IN GOD.

BY

JOHN WITHERSPOON, D. D. L. L. D.

Col. N. C. P.

ISAIAH I. 10.

Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.

HAVING, in a former discourse, opened the character and state of those who are called upon, and exhorted to trust in the name of the Lord, and entered upon the *second thing* proposed; which was, to explain the duty of trust in God, and to point out its foundation; and having in this view considered the nature of absolute promises,—I proceed,

2. To consider the nature and use of *conditional* promises. These I am obliged, for greater distinctness, to

divide into three different heads.—1. There are promises made to persons of such or such a character, or in such or such a state.—2. There are promises, the performance of which is suspended on our compliance with something previously required, as the condition of obtaining them.—3. There are promises, not only suspended on both the preceding terms, but upon the supposition of some circumstances in themselves uncertain, or to us unknown. Let us consider each of these with care and attention.

1. There are promises made to persons of such or such a character, or in such or such a state, which are therefore to be applied and rested on, according as the evidence of our being of this character, or in this state, is clear or obscure. In this I have particularly in view, the blessings of salvation, the pardon of sin, peace with God, the spirit of sanctification, and a right to everlasting life. These all lie in an unbroken chain, and inseparable connection, and might have been more briefly expressed, by an interest in Christ the Saviour, who is the author, source and sum of these blessings; *for all the promises of God in him, are yea, and in him Amen, to the glory of God by us.* Let no judicious attentive hearer be surprised or dissatisfied, that I have ranked these among conditional promises, for you may observe that I have expressed myself thus, they are promises made to persons of such or such a character, or in such or such a state. In this, they certainly differ from the promises properly *absolute*, mentioned above. It is far from my intention to do injury to that fundamental truth, that salvation is by grace. I esteem that doctrine which proceeds upon a self-righteous system, to be contrary to the word of God, and most pernicious to the souls of men. There is nothing at all required in Scripture to be performed by us, as a purchasing or meriting condition. Every gracious act of the Divine government,

government, in our favour, is the fruit of the Redeemer's purchase, and every holy disposition wrought in us is the effect of his Almighty grace. But it is certain at the same time, that in order to our accepting those blessings, we must be truly and deeply humbled, and see ourselves to be incapable and helpless. We must be unfeignedly willing to renounce all claim of merit, and accept of salvation as it is offered in the Gospel; that is, in its full extent, and in the free and sovereign manner of its communication. So far, surely, we must say, the promises of the Gospel are conditional, or wholly pervert the word of God. I know of no promises then to the unbelieving and impenitent, unless you call that a promise, that they shall have *their portion in the lake of fire that burneth with brimstone; and that the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever.*

Hear it, my dear brethren, it is the *needy, thirsty, sensible* soul that is invited to come and find rest. *Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk without money and without price. Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* If any shall think fit further to say, that the very destination of the vessels of mercy, is of God's sovereign pleasure, that conviction itself is by a day of his power, and that faith which interests us in Christ's righteousness is his gift: I agree to the whole, but observe, that it is improperly introduced here. No use can possibly be made of the Divine decree in the application of the promises. It is inverting the order of things. Can any man say, I trust in the mercy of God, because I have been ordained to everlasting life? No man can derive comfort from this, till by his effectual calling it is published, and begins to be accomplished; and then he may look back with wonder

der and gratitude to that everlasting love, by which he was chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. Can you judge of the fruit of a tree by looking upon the root? No, but you judge of the strength and deepness of the root, by the fulness of the fruit, and the vigour and verdure of the branches. From an improper mixture of what belongs to the secret will of God, and what belongs to us, as our duty, much error and confusion arises.

Now, my brethren, as to the application of these promises of pardon and peace, the humbled sinner, the man among us, who walketh in darkness and hath no light,—who is burdened with a sense of guilt, and discouraged by the threatenings of the law, the accusations of conscience, and the pure and holy nature of God,—who, perhaps, has all this aggravated by distress and trouble, is called to trust in the name of the Lord, and stay himself upon his God. He is invited to consider and rest on the extent of the call, the immutability of the promise, and the riches of Divine grace. If he is so far from pleading any merit in himself, or being dissatisfied with the plan of salvation laid down in the Gospel, that he is making every thing an argument against himself, and dare not lay hold of, or appropriate so unspeakable a mercy: This is just the effect of distrust, and he is called, in the strongest manner, in the text, to *trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God*. With how many gracious assurances for this purpose is the Scripture filled. John vi. 37. *All that the Father hath given me shall come to me, and him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.* Heb. vii. 25. *Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come to God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.* Rev. xxii. 17. *And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will,*

will, let him take of the water of life freely. All things, Christ excepted, are to be renounced to the all-sufficiency of a Redeemer, to be the foundation of our hope. The penitent will say with the Apostle, Phil. iii. 8. *Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, even the righteousness which is of God by faith.*

2. There is a second class of promises, the performance of which is suspended on our previous compliance with something required as the condition of obtaining them. In these we are not only called to accept of the Divine mercy, but commanded to obey the Divine will. The order in which I have placed these, will, I hope, prevent you from misunderstanding or misapplying what may be said on them. This class includes all the promises in Scripture, regarding the daily progress of a believer in his sanctification and conformity to God, as well as the increase of his comfort and peace. I am sensible, that as the reconciliation of a sinner to God, and his right to what is called in Scripture *the promise* of eternal life, is of free and unmerited mercy, so, no doubt, all the inferior or subordinate promises flow from the same source, nay, in a certain measure, they are entirely upon the same footing with those formerly mentioned; that is to say, final perseverance, real growth in the spiritual life, and necessary comfort, are the sure and purchased portion of every one that is born of God. Rom. viii. 29. *For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren.* But in the distribution of those gifts, particularly

ticularly in their measure, there is not only an unknown regard to the good pleasure of God, but a known and established regard to our conduct in duty. Thus the abundant supply of the Spirit is the fruit and return of diligence in prayer. Matt. vii. 7. *Ask and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you.* See also Ezekiel xxxvi. 25. compared with the 37. *Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean from all your filthiness; and from all your idols will I cleanse you, &c.* Thus saith the Lord, *Yet for all this will I be enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them.* Thus also inward consolation, as well as outward security, is expressly promised as the effect and reward of uniformity and diligence in duty. Isa. xxxii. 17. *And the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness, and assurance for ever.* As the counter part and illustration of this, you see, that a departure from the path of duty brings on the threatened, or, perhaps, I ought to call it, the promised rod of correction. Pl. lxxxix. 30.—33. *But if his children shall forsake my law, and not walk in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgressions with a rod, and their iniquities with stripes. Nevertheless, my loving kindness will I not take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail.* In the same manner, Isa. xl. 30, 31. *Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary;—they shall walk and not faint.* Agreeably to all this, you know, our blessed Lord prescribed watchfulness and prayer as the great preservatives against temptation, and whoever expects either spiritual strength or comfort, while he relaxes his diligence in the way of duty,

ty, is guilty of that sin, which is called in Scripture, tempting God; and shall assuredly meet with a dreadful disappointment.

My brethren, as much of the daily exercise of real believers regards their progress in sanctification, and their peace and comfort, it is proper that you should carefully attend to the tenor of these promises, and to what ought to be your reliance upon them. I shall sum up, in a few particulars, what I apprehend to be of most importance.

1. Trust in these promises implies self-denial, and a deep sense of your own weakness. These promises would be unnecessary and superfluous, were we not insufficient of ourselves for any thing that is good. Trust in God stands directly opposed to all self-dependence. Prov. iii. 5. *Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding.* How jealous God is, if I may speak so, of the honour that is due to him in this respect, may be seen from the many foul and shameful crimes into which he permitted some of his best saints to fall, when they were off their guard, by sloth, or still more provoked him by pride and presumption. Noah's drunkenness, Moses's passion, David's adultery and murder, and Peter's denial of his master. 1 Cor. x. 11, 12. *Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.* For this reason the Apostle Paul says, with great propriety, and with great force, which is equally applicable to himself and other believers, a seeming paradox; 1 Cor. xii. 10. *For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

2. As we are to put no trust in ourselves, so we are to exercise the most unshaken confidence of our being able to discharge any duty, or undergo any trial by the help

of the Almighty.—Oh! how ready are we to sin on both hands? How often do we presume upon our own strength, and forget the necessity of applying for Divine aid?—And on the other hand, how prone are we to timidity or despondence in difficult cases? When corruptions have long kept their ground, we are ready to dread their influence, and to make but little out of the promises in Scripture, that we shall be made *more than conquerors through him that loved us*. We have learned, by sad experience, that in us dwelleth no good thing, and yet it is long before we will attend to the lesson that follows hard upon it, *My grace is sufficient for thee, and my strength shall be made perfect in weakness*.

3. As these promises are expressly made to the diligent, you must still remember that your own attention and application to duty is essentially necessary, and that the assistance promised from on high, is always represented in Scripture as an argument and encouragement to diligence, and not a warrant or excuse for sloth. Philip. ii. 12. *Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure*. It is also well worthy of notice, that the same Prophet Ezekiel, who says, chap. xxxvi. 26. *A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you*, changes the form of his expression; and in another place, chap. xviii. 31, 32. speaks in the following terms: *Cast away from you all your transgressions whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God; wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye*. In consequence of this,

4. In the last place, trust in God will make us ready to acknowledge, that when we fail in duty, when we forget

forget or break our resolutions, the fault is certainly in ourselves. It is impossible to excuse or justify ourselves in any degree, without laying the blame, in the same proportion, upon God, and calling in question his faithfulness and truth. But whatever our treacherous hearts may sinfully suggest, we are not straitened in God, but straitened in our own bowels. We find him pleading his own cause, in this respect, in many passages of Scripture, Isa. lix. 1. *Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that he cannot hear; but your sins have separated between you and your God, and your iniquities have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.* Upon the whole, trust in these promises is no other than an humble and diligent application to duty, under a deep sense of weakness, and dependence on promised strength, accompanied with a firm persuasion, that *in the name of the Lord we shall tread down our enemies*, and go on from strength to strength, *till we appear before God in Zion.*

3. Another class of promises are those that are suspended, not only on the same conditions with the two former, but upon some other circumstances in themselves uncertain, or to us unseen. These are temporal mercies, or rather temporal prosperity, deliverance from present distress, and abundance or affluence of outward enjoyments. Perhaps we may also add spiritual consolation, and sensible joy in God. I find no temporal promise precisely fixed to the servant of God but this: *Bread shall be given him, and his water shall be sure*; and it is certainly his duty, in the most straitening circumstances, to maintain a confident dependence on the power and wisdom of Providence for necessary supply. I do not condemn those who, when reduced to extremity, have actually pleaded this Divine promise, and against hope, have believed in hope; and I am persuaded instances have not
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been wanting of relief, furnished in a manner next to miraculous. But as to every other degree of temporal prosperity, God hath reserved it in his own hand to give or withhold it at his pleasure, that is, as he sees it will be most for his glory, and the benefit of his people. It is lawful then, my brethren, for you to endeavour to procure, by honest industry, the increase of your substance, to look well to the state of your flocks and your herds, and to ask by prayer the blessing of God upon your labours. It is lawful, and it is your duty by regularity and care, to preserve life and health, as well to ask of the Father of your spirits, recovery from sickness, or deliverance from any other kind of distress. But you are not warranted to believe that these petitions shall be granted in hand, or in your own time and measure, even though you ask them in sincerity with the prayer of faith. There may be reasons for withholding them, and yet you may be accepted in your prayers. An infinitely wise God knows best what is for your good, and he only hath a right to determine in what part of his own service; where and how long he shall employ you. Trust in God, therefore, in this respect, implies a careful attention to the tenor of the promises with regard to temporal mercies, and not to look for, or even, if possible, desire what he hath not promised to bestow.

If I am not mistaken, we shall find it of moment, upon this subject, to observe, both what he hath not and what he hath certainly promised. He has no where promised that his own people shall be the richest or the greatest on earth; but he hath certainly promised to bless their provision, and assured them, that a little that a just man hath, shall be better than the riches of many wicked. He has not promised that they shall be free from suffering; but he hath certainly promised to support them by

his

his own presence under their distress. Isa. xliii. 2. *When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.* The truth is, he hath promised that *all things shall work together for their good.* In one word, they have indeed all mercies promised, only they themselves are not in a condition, at present, to judge what they may use with safety, and what not. As the heir of an opulent estate, though he is proprietor of all, yet is laid under restraint while in infancy and nonage, because he would soon ruin himself if it were committed to his own management; so the believer, though an heir of God, and joint heir with Christ, yet till he is meet for the inheritance, he must be at his Maker's and Redeemer's disposal. Take in, therefore, only this limitation, and then see his extensive charter. 1 Cor. iii. 21.—*For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.* What then is the duty of a child to God? It is to breathe after more and more submission to the Divine will, and to annex this reservation to every petition of a temporal nature, Nevertheless, not my will but thine be done. And, oh! my brethren, how happy the person who hath seen the weakness of human judgment; who waits the intimation of God's will, before he will suffer his desires to fasten with eagerness on any earthly comfort, and who endeavours to keep himself free from perplexity, by an humble and submissive reliance on the all-sufficiency of God!

I observed, in entering on this part of the subject, that spiritual consolation, or sensible joy in God, is to be considered as a promise of the same class, which must, there-

fore, be asked with submission, and is dispensed according to the good pleasure of a gracious but sovereign God. I am sensible, as has been formerly observed, with another view, that some degree of comfort necessarily follows from a believer's relation to God; but many pious persons seem to desire and to expect sensible comfort in a higher measure than God sees it meet to give them, or than is proper for them in the present state. It is with spiritual prosperity as with temporal, every one cannot bear it. Therefore, it is our duty still to be sensible that we have much more comfort and peace than we deserve, and as we desire and strive for greater degrees of it, to accompany these desires with much humility and resignation to the will of God.

I proceed now to the last thing proposed, which was to make a practical application of this subject for your instruction and direction.

1. From what has been said, you may see what judgment you ought to form of inward suggestions, and strong or particular impressions upon your minds. There are some extremely prone to interpret a text of scripture, suddenly suggested to their minds, or any strong impression made on them, as an immediate message from God, to be directly applied to themselves: Others, in opposition to this, as enthusiastical and visionary, seem to give up every expectation of being able to say with the Psalmist, *I bless the Lord who hath given me counsel, my reins also instruct me in the night season*. I beg, therefore, that you may observe, that the suggestion of a passage of scripture, of itself gives no title to the immediate application of it, because the great deceiver may undoubtedly suggest scripture, as we find he could reason from it in our Saviour's temptation. We are, in every such case, to consider

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the tenor of it, if it be a promise or encouragement, that is, how and in what manner it may be safely applied. If any thing happens to be suggested that expressly suits our present condition, either by setting home the obligation of duty, with particular evidence upon the conscience, or pointing out the grounds of comfort, it ought to be thankfully acknowledged as from the Spirit of God. For example, if a person, under the power of a spirit of bondage, and fear of Divine wrath, hath suggested to him any of the extensive gracious assurances of mercy to the chief of sinners, it is his duty to lay hold of it. It is directly suited to his condition, and would be the very thing that a wise and judicious pastor would recommend to him for his relief. He may therefore, without hesitation, bless God for it, if it is brought with power and efficacy upon his heart. In the same manner, if a person under trouble hath suggested to him any of the promises of support under it, surely he ought, in the discharge of his duty, firmly to rely on the accomplishment of that part of the word of God. But in the reflex examination of a person's character or state, to apply the sudden suggestion of a promise or privilege, perhaps of a conditional nature, is certainly both sinful and dangerous. Sinful, because without warrant; and dangerous, because leading to delusion.

2. From what hath been said, you may see what it is that we ought to seek for with the greatest earnestness, and may hope to obtain with the greatest confidence. Recollect, I beseech you, the order in which I have mentioned the promises of God as the objects of trust and reliance. First of all the promises of salvation, deliverance from the guilt of sin, and a right to everlasting life; next whatever is necessary to the preservation and improve-

ment of the spiritual life; and then in the third place, proper accommodation, and suitable provision in our passage through the present world. They are here ranked according to their value in themselves, and the value which we should put upon them. Let us, therefore, take care that we never violate this order, which is necessary, not only because of their comparative value, but because of their mutual influence one upon another. It is in vain for us to expect to attain to the habit or practice of holiness, till we are united to God by faith in Jesus Christ. All the promises of the gospel are ratified in him. All the Divine fulness is treasured up in him. Every Divine gift is dispensed by him. Therefore, he says, John xv. 4. *Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.* And the Apostle Paul, Gal. ii. 20. *I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*

In the same manner nothing can be more preposterous, than to fix our affections upon temporal mercies, or our attention upon the promises that relate to them, so as to lose view of our interest in God's favour, and the progress of our sanctification. All the temporal promises in scripture are made to the children of God as such, and for carrying on the purposes of his grace in them.—Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. There is no promise in the whole volume of inspiration to the wicked and impenitent. *There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.* He will either rebuke them in his wrath and chasten them in his hot displeasure, or give them up to a cursed, hardening, stupifying prosperity,

than which, no state on earth is more to be dreaded.—Christian! never suffer an anxiety about your outward state to supplant or go before, or even to be separated from a concern, that you may not be found wanting when weighed in the balance of the sanctuary.

3. Let me beseech you to adore the wisdom, justice and mercy of God, in the order he hath established, according to the different nature of the promises. That which is of most, nay, properly speaking, of unspeakable value, and radically contains all the rest, is placed first in order, and offered in the most free and gracious manner, without money and without price. Salvation is preached to the chief of sinners, and a Saviour held forth as able to save to the uttermost all that come to God by him. Many uses might be made of this, but the single use I intend to make of it at present, as connected with the duty of trust, is to silence the complaints of envy and impatience. How prone are many to look with an evil eye upon the more extensive possessions, and greater apparent outward comfort which others enjoy? Does it not astonish you to think how much unbelief and ingratitude there is in those repining thoughts? Meanness of rank, and poverty of state, are no hinderance at all to an interest in Christ, and a right to everlasting life. Nay, the Gospel is preached to the poor.—Many a Lazarus has been carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom, while the rich and luxurious have lifted up their eyes in torments. Will you, can you, dare you then complain? Will you envy the man of the world, his stately palace, his elegant furniture, and his sumptuous fare? What is the amplest portion in the present life compared with the sure mercies of David? What child of God would exchange with any wicked man a prison for a palace, or a scaffold for a throne?

I beseech you to add to all this, that even with regard to present peace or comfort, there is no comparison between a good man and a bad. *A man's life doth not consist in the abundance of the things which he possesses.* This is a truth not only often repeated in the sacred oracles, but written in the clearest and most legible characters in the history of Providence.—Nay, even independently of virtue or religion itself, every human calamity, whether arising from sickness, reproach, contention, fear, or ungratified desire, rages with greater violence in the higher, than in the lower stations of life. A vain and conceited monarch once sent to ask at an heathen oracle, who was the happiest man on earth? and met with a deserved disappointment in the reply. If we should put a question much more profitable as well as much more easily resolved, in what rank of life the most exquisite human misery has been found? I have no doubt but it ought to be answered upon a throne. Experience will always ratify the wise man's observation: *Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.* A sanctified lot is an inestimable treasure. The blessing of God on a cruise of oil, and a pot of meal, is better than inexhaustible mines of gold and silver. What cause of contentment and patience to the child of God!

In the last place, you may learn, from what has been said on the subject, what is the plainest, the shortest, and indeed, the only sure way to deliverance from distress or calamity of whatever kind. It is to fly to the mercy of God through the blood of Christ, to renew the exercises of faith in him, and in proportion as it pleases God, to fill you with all joy and peace in believing; you will perceive every other covenant-blessing flow clear and unmixed from this inexhausted source. It will lead to repentance,

ance, humiliation and submission. The sanctified use of the affliction will be obtained, and this brings deliverance of itself; for no rod will be continued longer than it hath answered its end. At any rate, when suffering is necessary, grace, to suffer with patience, shall not be withheld. Would you have any more, and is not this remedy always at hand? Can the poorest man say, it is not within the reach of his purse? It is at once effectual and universal. It was once said in contempt of a worthy and pious minister, that he made so much of the blood of Christ, that he would apply it even to a broken bone. But bating what may be thought indecent in the expression, chosen on purpose to bring a good man into ridicule, the thing itself, I make bold to affirm, is a great and precious truth. Faith in the blood of Christ makes a man superior to all sufferings. It softens their aspect—it abates their severity—nay, it changes their nature. When a man is under distress or calamity of any kind, and considers it only in itself, and independently of his relation to God, it retains its old nature, and tastes with all the bitterness of the original curse; but when it is considered as limited in its nature—its measure, and its continuance by a kind Saviour, the believer submits to it with patience, as a part of his Creator's will; bears it with patience in his Redeemer's strength, and sometimes is enabled to embrace it with pleasure, as serving to carry him to his Father's presence. Is this going too far? No, my dear brethren; there are great realities to which the word of God, and the experience of his saints, bear united evidence. Many here present, I doubt not, have been witness of this truth, in the carriage of their relations now with God; and not a few, I trust, will repeat the testimony to succeeding ages. I conclude all with that animated passage of the Apostle

Paul.—2 Cor. iv. 16, 17. *For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.*

Would you have any more, and not this remedy?—
 one sinning, as it is said, that it is not within the
 reach of his power? It is at once effectual and universal.
 It has once said in a word, and done it.
 that he made so much of the blood of Christ, that
 he would apply it even to a broken bone. But being
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 for purpose to bring a good man into ridicule, the young
 man, I make bold to affirm is a good and pious man.
 All the good of Christ makes a man superior to all
 suffering. It takes their sting—it makes their severity
 easy, it changes their nature. When a man is so
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 its old nature, and takes with all the bitterness of the
 great sufferer; but when it is considered as united to it
 nature—in ignorance, and its continuance by a kind of
 and the believer, looking to it with patience, does not at
 the Creator's will; he is with patience in his highest
 strength, and to himself is enabled to endure it with
 patience, as seeing to every thing with his Father's presence.
 is his going to see? No, my dear brethren, there are
 great reasons to which the word of God, and the expe-
 rience of his Spirit, have raised evidence. Many are
 of them, I think, not least partakers of the fruits of
 the marriage of that relation now with God; and now
 every thing will rather testify to his glory, and
 surround all with that eternal praise of the Father.

SERMON XXX.

CHRISTIAN WARFARE.

BY

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I CORINTHIANS XVI. 13.

—Quit you like men, be strong.

AMONG the many comparisons used in Scripture to illustrate the Christian life, that of a fight or warfare is a principal one. To this the Apostle evidently refers in the text. He addresses the believing Corinthians, as a general would his soldiers, who expected immediately to engage with the enemy. We find nearly the same words used by the Philistines, in exciting one another to battle with Israel: *Be strong and quite yourselves like men, O ye Philistines, that ye be not servants unto the Hebrews, as they have been to you: Quit yourselves like men, and fight.* It is not improbable that the Apostle had this animated speech in view; and if not, it

was

was natural, with the figure in his mind, thus to express himself. It is as though he had said, "You are like soldiers in actual war; behave then, not as children, who are weak and easily intimidated; but exert that strength, courage and fortitude worthy of men in an hour of trial and danger."

This exhortation is proper to be addressed to Christians in every age; and it is now addressed to you, my believing brethren: *Quit you like men,—be strong.* I shall, *first*, mention the enemies with which you have to contend; *secondly*, shew what is implied in the exhortation; and then conclude with some motives to encourage and animate you in the fight.

The enemies with which you have to contend, are generally ranked under these three classes; the *devil*, the *world*, and the *flesh*.

First, The *devil* is a watchful, cunning and unwearied enemy. After his revolt from God, he seduced our first parents, and has thus brought the whole race into sin and misery. Opposed himself to all goodness, he is become the tyrant and destroyer of human kind. *As a roaring lion he walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.* Though we are not ignorant of many of his devices, yet it is impossible to tell either when, and in what way he will assail us, or to distinguish precisely his suggestions from the corrupt desires of our own hearts. With these he co-operates. He knows the frame of our bodies, and has near access to our spirits.—He presents evil under the specious appearance of good. He suits his temptations to the various dispositions of men, and to the different periods of their lives. He leads to presumption, and he drives to despair. He withdraws for a time, and waits an unguarded hour, that he may attack with the greater success. Sometimes he shoots like fiery darts, dreadful

dreadful and blasphemous thoughts, occasioning extreme uneasiness and horror in the mind.

With this enemy, my Christian soldiers, you have to contend; a fallen spirit, active, powerful, naturally subtle, and long versed in the practice of guile; not only indeed with one, but many; for though there is a great adversary, the god of this world, yet under him hosts are marshalled, whom he leads to war. The Apostle, in speaking of the Christian warfare, reckons those evil spirits to be numerous and powerful. *We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities;—against powers;—against the rulers of the darkness of this world;—against spiritual wickedness in high places.*

Secondly, The world is another powerful enemy. In this class we count the *men* of the world, and the *things* of the world.

The *men* of the world engage on the side of the devil. By their allurements they entice to sin, and by their reproaches, deter from duty. Not to mention the furious persecutions which they have sometimes carried on against Christians, and from which we, in this age and country, are delivered, they are always dangerous. Their conversation and example are contagious. It requires no small resolution at times, to withstand their smiles, and encounter their frowns;—to adhere steadily and singularly to duty when the customs of the world all tend another way;—to sacrifice popularity, and venture even character for the cause of religion.—It sometimes happens too, that those with whom the Christian is closely connected are his greatest opposers; when his foes are those of his own household. In this case the danger is peculiarly great. From others he may withdraw, but with these he is obliged to associate.

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Under the *things* of the world we count *honours, profits and pleasures*. How dangerous these are, we see every day, in the fatal experience of others, and the state of our own hearts. We need, and may lawfully enjoy a share of them, but they too often engross our affections and attention. The Christian is in the more danger from this quarter, because he is called to engage in the pursuit of these, and under the appearance of duty, they lead him astray. He is apt to set a higher value upon them than they deserve, to repine under disappointment, and to be improperly elated at success; besides the temptation there is to seek them by unjustifiable ways. We cannot serve God and Mammon. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. The evil we have to fear is not from the things of the world, which are in themselves good; but from that temper and conduct which they produce in us. This leads me to mention,

Thirdly, That the *flesh*, by which is meant the corrupt nature, is the most dangerous enemy of all. The principle of sin is not fully subdued in believers. This is the law in the members which wars against the law of the mind, and brings into captivity to the law of sin. Were it not for this, the attempts of Satan would be unsuccessful. Were it not for this, the things of the world would have no dangerous tendency. Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.— This is the traitor within the walls, which betrays us into the hands of the enemy. Could we subdue this, we need not fear those without. The Christian then, has to fight with himself. Remains of evil desires are still in his heart, and strive to prevail over him.

These are the enemies, my brethren, with which you are called to contend. Let not your hearts faint on the view

view of them; but, *quit you like men,—be strong.* This exhortation implies,

First, That you banish unnecessary fears, and engage in the warfare with boldness and resolution. So much fear of an enemy as leads to watchfulness and caution, is highly useful. To despise an enemy, is often the way to be beaten. Peculiarly in the Christian fight, *bappy is the man that feareth always.* There is a fear, however, which depresses the spirits and hinders exertion. This ought to be laid aside. Discouragements increase the difficulties; small ones are then magnified, and great ones assume a most formidable appearance; whereas, if encountered with patience, firmness and perseverance, those would vanish, and these lay aside their terrors. While an enemy is considered as dangerous, he ought not to be deemed invincible. To despair is to yield ground, and encourage an attack. It is well known what advantage this temper gives Satan over believers, and how carefully he improves it. He then harasses them with distressing thoughts, horrid suggestions, and is only not permitted to drive them into final ruin. Believers, therefore, ought to maintain an undaunted courage and resolution.

Again, There is implied, that they fight in Divine strength. In themselves they are indeed weak, and wholly unequal to the conflict; but the grace of God is sufficient for them. Hear the holy challenge of the Apostle: *If God be for us, who can be against us?* Trusting in his power, and faithfulness to fulfil all his promises in Christ, they ought to engage with their enemies. He hath provided for them an armour which is proof against every assault. In putting on this, and managing it aright, safety and victory are ensured.—*My brethren*, says the Apostle, *be strong in the Lord, and in the power*

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of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breast-plate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit. Thus we see, that as in the ancient mode of making war among men, there were pieces of armour to protect the whole body from injury, and weapons with which to assail; so in the spiritual warfare, believers are armed and encouraged to go forth in the strength of the Lord. It need only be added,

Further, As implied in this exhortation, that they persevere in the combat. If they withdraw, or cease their exertions, they will be overcome.—The enemies continues their hostilities as long as believers are in this world. There is no rest or peace to them, but their whole life is a constant warfare. *Let not him, therefore, that girdeth on his harness, boast himself as he that putteth it off.* Many, alas! who seemed manfully to begin the contest, and continued it for a time, being allured by the things of this world, or deterred by difficulties, have given it over, and returned to their former slavery. These are likely to fall a prey. *He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.* Let me now mention some motives to encourage and animate you in this warfare.

First, Your cause is good and highly important. The Apostle calls it *the good fight of faith*. Do men in the wars of this world, boldly venture their lives when persuaded that their cause is righteous? Much more ought

Christians

Christians to encourage themselves. They are engaged in the best and noblest of causes; on the side of God, against every thing that is base, cruel, and oppressive. No less depends on the part they act than eternal happiness or misery. Do the men of this world fight for fading honours and emoluments? Is it for these that millions in every age have been slaughtered, and this earth covered with blood? And shall not Christians contend for *an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away; for a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will bestow on every conqueror*?—We admire the man, who, at the head of armies, has over-run nations, and spread his conquests far and wide; we almost adore him, who nobly withstands the iron hand of oppression, and successfully vindicates the insulted rights of human nature; but the Christian soldier is a more noble spectacle, a more glorious character. Though not surrounded with those external things which attract and dazzle the attention of mankind, yet he possesses more true magnanimity, and more genuine worth. The Judge of the universe approves, and exalted spirits behold him with wonder and delight. Should not then the goodness of the cause, and the importance of its issue, as to yourselves, encourage and animate you, my believing friends? Mahomet promised to his followers who fell in battle, immediate entrance into a Paradise; but to you, unerring truth hath given assurance of *fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore*.

A second motive to animate you is, that you are engaged in the presence of many spectators. You act continually, in the sight of the great and glorious God. His eye penetrates into the inmost recesses of your hearts. He will be your impartial judge, and from his hand you will receive your reward or your doom. How far angels
are

are witnesses of our actions is not certainly known. They are, however, not uninterested in the redemption of man. At the birth of the Saviour they sang together in heavenly strains, and have been frequently employed on messages of grace. We are expressly informed, that *there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth*; that the angels are *all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation*. The Apostle charged Timothy *before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels*.

The consideration of our being open to the view of those holy and exalted spirits, who have charge of us, and who earnestly desire our success, ought to inspire us with fortitude and resolution. Shall we behave meanly in the presence of superior beings? Shall we disgrace ourselves in the sight of heaven? Could we suppose them to feel the least uneasy sensation, what grief and shame must they suffer on our account, when we act unworthy our character? Yea, what indignation, to see creatures redeemed at an infinite expence, and with the most glorious prospects before them, complying with the temptations of Satan and the world, and yielding to the corrupt desires of their own hearts!

In the third place, You fight under Jesus Christ, the captain of salvation. Are soldiers inspired by an attachment to their king? by a confidence in their leader? Surely believers may be of good courage, Jesus is the King of kings. He is the author and finisher of faith. He leads you by his example, and encourages you by his words. Will you suffer me to introduce here an example from history, of the effect of the conduct and speech of an earthly king, before an engagement with his enemy? Or is it not suitable, and may we not compare great things with small?—Henry the Fourth of France, just before a battle,

battle, in which he obtained an entire victory, uttered a generous prayer in a voice, and with a countenance that inspired all who heard and beheld him, with like magnanimity; then turning to the squadron, at the head of which he designed to charge, "My fellow-soldiers," said he, "as you run my fortune, so do I yours; your safety consists in keeping well your ranks; but if the heat of the action should force you to disorder, think of nothing but rallying again; if you lose sight of your colours and standards, look round for the white plume in my beaver; you shall see it wherever you are, and it shall lead you to glory and to victory." Examples of this kind fill the mind with great and noble ideas. We admire the man who, in the conscious integrity of his heart, boldly faces great and immediate danger, and inspires all around him with the like magnanimity. But, how little does every human example appear, compared with him who leads the armies of the saints; with him who conflicted with the powers of darkness; with him who gave his life a ransom; who, by his own power, rose from the bed of death; who triumphantly entered into everlasting glory; and who is conducting his followers in safety thither, through all the difficulties and dangers which surround them! What encouraging words are these, *Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. Because I live, ye shall live also.* Hear how he animates them from his celestial throne: *To him that overcometh, will I grant to sit with me on my throne, even as I also overcame, and am sat down with my Father on his throne.* Believers, your Leader is great and successful; you fight under the banner of the cross; the motto is LOVE; be not afraid, how stern appearance soever your enemies may assume; for,

In the last place, You are sure of victory in the end. The prospect of success tends greatly to encourage in any

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undertaking; but in no earthly thing have you the same assurance, as in your spiritual warfare. You have the word of truth that you shall prove victorious. You are *compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses* from the beginning of the world till this day, who all declare that they have been *more than conquerors through him that loved them*. Your enemies are already subdued, so far as that they can never recover dominion over you. Injure you they will, but cannot prevail; make opposition they will, but it is ineffectual. Jesus Christ by his blood has atoned for your guilt; by his grace he purifies your hearts; and he hath *spoiled principalities and powers, made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them*; yea, he hath entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for you. Should not this consideration encourage and animate you? He is a coward, indeed, who will not fight when sure of success; he has not the spirit of a man, who will not withstand the shock with victory in his view.

Let us remember at the same time, that though the enemies are conquered, yet our own exertions are necessary. In the Christian warfare we are considered as rational creatures, and as free agents. Dependence on Divine strength, and endeavours of our own, are perfectly consistent. If we sit down in negligence and inaction, we need not hope for victory. There are two extremes in this case, from one or other of which we are in danger. The one is the neglect of due watchfulness, and the attendance upon appointed means, thinking that God will do all for us; the other is a too great confidence in our own strength, and not relying on the strength of the Almighty. What God hath joined let us not put asunder. Look around you and see the connection established between the means and the end; see that the means are necessary to attain the end; and that these are not successful without the Divine blessing. Believe that you

must

must work out your own salvation with fear and trembling ; and that God must work in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure, otherwise you work in vain.

These motives surely are enough to keep you from despondency, and to animate you against all your enemies. Your cause is good, and infinitely important. You contend in the presence of God and the holy angels ; and under the banner of Jesus Christ, who will lead you to glory and to victory.

Allow me, on this subject, to expostulate a little with you, my friends, who have never engaged in the Christian warfare. Think, for a moment, on the condition in which you are, and the awful consequences of it. You serve the devil and your own wicked lusts. These have dominion over you, and will lead you to inevitable ruin. You cannot now fully reconcile yourselves to the service. There is that within you which tells you, that you are guilty, and exposed to the displeasure of your Maker and Judge ; but still you have neither will nor resolution to assert your liberty. *The wages of sin is death.* It now flatters and deceives you ; it is, in the mean time, binding you fast, and you will, at length be cast into utter darkness, where is *weeping and gnashing of teeth.* The Lord Jesus shall prove successful over Satan, and all who take part with him. You have joined the weakest side. All enemies shall be put under his feet. Hear that dreadful sentence which he will pronounce upon impenitent sinners of our race, when he comes to judge the world in righteousness : *Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.* If you now join on the side of those rebellious spirits, you must expect to share in their punishment.

My friends, there is yet hope. There is a treaty of reconciliation carrying on. Delay not to throw down the

weapons of your rebellion. Flee from the camp of Satan. Come inlist under the banner of Christ. He will reward you with glory, honour, and immortality. In justice he might have refused, before now, to listen to any proposals of peace, but he is long-suffering and patient. Come, and what is past shall be forgotten. He will *take away all iniquity, and receive you graciously.*

Are there any here who formerly seemed to engage in the Christian warfare, and have returned again to the service of sin? What has been the reason of this conduct? Did you meet with difficulties which deterred you? Or, were the temptations of Satan and the world too powerful for you? You have forfeited the name of soldiers. You are cowards and deserters. Go, ye dispirited men, we would not fight in such company. Separate you from the camp of Israel, that we may know who are our enemies. Or, rather, let me call upon you, my deluded friends, to return while mercy is offered. Return and disgrace the cause no more. Return and retrieve the honours you have lost.—*Quit yourselves like men, and fight.*

My believing brethren, to whom this subject is more particularly addressed, you have heard the enemies with which you have to contend, the duties to which you are called, and some motives to encourage and animate you. Why should any of you fear? May not each of you, under difficulties, say with the Psalmist, *Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.* Or, may you not adopt his more confident language, and say, *The Lord is my light, and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear:*
though

though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident. It may be but a struggle or two more, and the warfare is finished. After crossing the Alpine hills, would you now sit down in inglorious ease? After so many victories already obtained, and when the enemies fly before you, would you lose the cause for ever? No, if you have the spirit of men;—if you would not submit to the galling yoke of sin and Satan;—if you would not suffer the reproaches of your own consciences, and the cruel scoffs and insults of tormented ghosts in their dungeons of eternal darkness;—if you regard the glory of the great God;—the love of a dying Saviour, and the inconceivable joys of heaven, yield not to the power of your enemies. *Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.*

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S E R.

SERMON XXXI.**THE VALUE OF THE SOUL.**

BY

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MATTHEW xvi. 26.

For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or, what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

THE candour with which our Lord treats his disciples upon all occasions, is a high evidence of his sincerity, and no inconsiderable evidence of the divinity of his mission. He not only tells them what they have to hope for, but what they have to fear, if they would be his sincere followers. He states the terms of their discipleship to them with great sincerity, whenever a favourable opportunity offers; nor does he on any occasion flatter their vanity.

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An instance of this we have in the verse but one that precedes our text : *Then said Jesus to his disciples, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.* The necessity, however, of being his disciples, hard as these terms may appear to a secure and profane world, is urged in the next verse, from the danger of neglecting the duty, and the benefits arising from a compliance therewith. *For whosoever will save his life shall lose it ; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.*

This same duty is recommended and enforced in the words of our text, from the nature of the loss sustained by those who do not thus deny themselves for Christ, take up the cross and follow him. *For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul ? or, what shall a man give in exchange for his soul ?*

You will easily perceive, my brethren, our Lord's argument in the text, to induce us to be his disciples, is founded on the inestimable value of the soul. It is of more worth than a whole world. To gain a world and lose a soul, is to sustain an irreparable loss ; for *what shall a man give in exchange for his soul ?* The mode of our Lord's expression evidently implies, there is nothing that can be given in exchange for a lost soul ; and the reason is obvious, because there is nothing in all the world that equals our precious soul in value ; no, nor all our world put together, for *what is a man profited, if he shall gain the WHOLE WORLD, and lose his own soul ?*

Our Lord supposes, in the text, for the sake of illustration, what, indeed, has never fallen to the lot of any one man ; that could he possess the whole world, its whole sovereignty and wealth, its whole honours and enjoyments of every nature, and that to the highest degree possible,

possible, they would be a vain purchase at the expence of his soul.

What then must be the folly of those who sell their souls for so small a share of any of these?—Who sell them for a thing of nought!

What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or, what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

What I propose from the words, by the aids of the Spirit of Grace, is,

- I. Consider the value of the soul in a few particulars.
- II. The nature of the loss sustained by those who lose their precious soul.
- III. The danger of losing it.

Let us enquire,

I. Wherein does the value of this precious soul appear?

By the soul I mean, that rational and immaterial principle that is in each of us, by which we are distinguished from the brutes that perish, and become wiser than the fowls of heaven. This soul is the offspring of God. Every soul of the human race receives its being immediately from him, without the intervention of any laws whereby it is propagated. He is, in the most proper sense of the term, *the Father of our spirits*. It is the observation of an eminent divine, that while all other beings were created by a single, *let them be, and, lo, they were*, the Sacred Trinity is represented as sitting in council on the creation of man. Thus, Gen. i. 26. *Let us make man*. It was not his body that was the subject of this consultation; for there are many bodies in the material universe as curious

rious in their formation, and, perhaps, as glorious in their nature, as the body of man; and which, therefore, would have as justly merited the consultation of heaven. It was this immaterial and precious soul, as united to the body.

But to proceed: The high value of this soul appears,

1. From its *nature* and *capacity*.

I have just said, that it is *spiritual* and *immaterial* in its nature. It does not consist of such gross and material parts as our bodies do; it is hereby raised far superior to them, and all the material universe, and becomes a partaker of the same kind of being with the angels of heaven; for they are spirits.—*Who maketh his angels spirits.* Yea, more, it is a partaker of the same kind of being with God himself, for *God is a spirit*. This, therefore, bespeaks its high dignity and inestimable value.

And from this spirituality of its nature is derived its capacity. It is capable of knowing God; not, indeed, in a perfect manner; for such is the infinite glory of the Divine nature and perfections, that he cannot be fully known by any of his creatures. *None by searching can find out God;—none can find out the Almighty unto perfection.* But the soul of man is capable of knowing something of the nature, the character and perfections of the Supreme JEHOVAH.—That JEHOVAH from whom all our happiness, as intelligent creatures, is derived, *whose favour is life, and his loving kindness better than life.*

This rational soul is also capable of knowing God's work's;—the sun, the moon, and the stars, which his fingers have framed. It is capable of knowing the various ranks of creatures in their several gradations:—*"Down from infinite to thee, from thee to nothing."* Many of these it has ranged into classes, and gone far in explaining their nature and their laws: And O the wonders

ders of wisdom, power, and goodness it has discovered in them! The works of God, both in creation and providence, are among those mirrors in which we behold the glory of the Divine perfections.

For the invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy-work. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. But it is this rational soul that enables us to see this glory, and render the honour of it to the great God.

This soul of ours is that also which constitutes us the subjects of moral government. We are hereby capacitated for knowing truth and error, sin and duty, and for rendering a rational obedience to the Divine law. We hereby become capable of rewards and punishments; in a word, capable of the whole system of duty, which is due from our race to God, and capable of all its consequent happiness. And this happiness is *eternal* in its duration, as well as *rational* in its nature.—For these souls of which we speak, are in their very nature *immortal*. You have heard that they are immaterial;—they have nothing in them that tends to dissolution;—they shall survive the ruins of the body,—survive this world itself, especially in its present form,—bear date with an unwaisting duration, and exist while God himself exists.

This is a property of the human soul of the highest moment to be attended to, and which instamps an infinite value upon it,—*it is immortal*. When yonder sun shall have grown dim with age,—when the moon and the stars shall enlighten our world no more, these souls of ours shall exist, and flourish in eternal youth. From hence

hence the soul derives its capacity of enjoying God, and of being happy in his immediate presence *for ever*. And this, too, greatly tends to illustrate the transcendent excellence of its nature.

And surely that must be highly valuable which is thus *spiritual* in its nature, *immortal* in its duration, and capable of such extensive knowledge, usefulness and happiness.

2. The value of the human soul appears from *the price that was paid for its redemption*. This was none other than the blood of the Son of God.—*Forasmuch as we know that we were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from our vain conversation received by tradition from our fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot*. The Apostle calls the price of our redemption the *blood of God*. *Feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood*.

The person who shed this blood was God as well as man. He was the Divine person, who, *being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God*. There is not a perfection of the Divine nature, however essential to Deity, or incommunicable to the creature, but what belongs to him, as well as the Father, and to him in the same sense with the Father. This is he who assumed our nature into a personal union with his Divine. How glorious the sight! Deity and humanity conjoined in one mysterious person, and yet so as to preserve each nature distinct from the other. This was he who fulfilled all righteousness for us, by a life of the most perfect obedience to the precepts of the law. This was the person who hath redeemed us to God by his blood. And did our time admit of considering here the nature of those sufferings our Lord endured previous to his death, and in
2 dying

dying on the accursed cross for us, it would greatly tend to enhance the value of this price in our estimation.

I shall only observe at present, that they include all the agonies of Gethsemane,—all the insults he endured from thence to Mount Calvary, and all the exquisite anguish of the cross, until he cried, *It is finished*, and gave up the ghost. But all this, my brethren, serves to illustrate the high value God sets upon that soul which he hath redeemed at so expensive a rate. Would God give the Son of his love to all that ignominy, suffering and death, to redeem a thing of nought? Verily no.

3. *The display of the perfections of God, exhibited in the plan of saving lost souls through Jesus Christ*, tends greatly to illustrate the value he puts upon them. This plan was laid from all eternity. Then it was the Sacred Three concerted and covenanted with each other respecting this important business, and each Person in the adorable Trinity took his part in the Divine design, and engaged for its execution in the fulness of time.

Thus it was, God loved us with an everlasting love. *I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore, with loving-kindness have I drawn thee.*—But what was it they deliberated upon? Whether they would save lost sinners? No, this was graciously fixed. It was the way, the manner of doing it, so as to secure the honour of God's moral government, and exhibit the glories of the Divine character in a proper point of light. The proposals of Mercy and claims of justice would seem to oppose each other.

Mercy was inclined to save the sinner, while Justice insisted upon his death, as the proper demerit of his sin.

Holiness too had its claim upon the sinner, and absolutely forbade his salvation, unless conformed to the Divine image; while Truth insisted upon the execution of the

the threatening of the law on the transgressor. But in the plan of saving men through Jesus Christ, all these several claims are answered, and gloriously harmonize. God can now *be just, and the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus.*

The *mercy* of God is illustrated in that the sinner is saved. The *justice* of God, in the satisfaction made by Christ's obedience to the precepts of the law, and his suffering its penal sanction, in the manner you have just heard, as the sinner's surety. His *holiness*, not only by the obedience of our Lord's life, which indeed is one of the brightest displays ever made of it, but also by that purity of heart and manners, to which this plan of salvation recovers us, by the agency of the Spirit of grace. His *truth* is illustrated, by the full execution of the threatenings of the law, in all their dread extent, though not on the sinner's own person, yet on the person of his surety; and his *faithfulness* in the fulfilment of his promises to the Divine Mediator, and to every true believer in and through him; while the *wisdom* of God shines with distinguished lustre, in concerting and executing a plan that unites all these *seemingly* jarring interests; a plan that so fully provides for securing and illustrating the Divine honour, and the saving of lost men. Thus, *mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other.*

From this brief sketch, you see what a mirror of Divine glory the plan of our salvation through Jesus Christ is. Here, *we all with open face behold as in a glass, the glory of the Lord.* Here, *the light of the knowledge of the glory of God shines in the face of Jesus Christ.* But what is all this about? Whose salvation are the three persons of the adorable Trinity thus planning and executing? That of fallen angels? No; that of *human souls.*
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It is their salvation which exhibits this glorious display of the Divine perfections and character. And, Oh! in what an important point of light does this set this soul of man! How inestimable its value, about whose salvation not only every person in the Trinity, but every attribute of the Divine nature, is thus somehow or other employed, and in and by which it is glorified!

4. *The provision God has made for the recovery of this soul to his image, and a capacity of enjoying him as his portion*, is a further evidence of its high value. He has given us the Sacred Scriptures, as a rule both of faith and manners. We are here taught all that is necessary for us to know and believe, to the saving of our souls. We are here taught the whole compass of our duty to God, our neighbour, and ourselves. Taught, *that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world.* Thus, all Scripture being given by inspiration of God, is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work. And in this respect, among others, the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. And you will please carefully to observe here, that the truths contained in the Sacred Scriptures, are the great means chosen and appointed by God for effecting our personal holiness. To this accords our Lord's prayer for his disciples.—*Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth.*

It is for the same end the ordinances of the Gospel are instituted. This is one great end of the sabbath, and all its appointments. It is, that we may by these hold an intercourse with God while in this life, and thus be trained up for holding the most delightful communion
with

with him in glory,—We read, that *faith cometh by bearing, and bearing by the word of God*. That faith by which our hearts are purified, made like God, and we trained up to a meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light. For the same gracious purpose has God appointed the Gospel-ministry, which is represented by the Apostle, as among the richest of our Lord's ascension-gifts. *When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. And he gave some Apostles, and some Prophets, and some Evangelists, and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints; for the work of the ministry; for the edifying of the body of Christ; till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man; unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ*. But I must not omit adding here, that as all these were but means, and therefore could not effect any thing in themselves, God has provided the Holy Spirit for rendering them effectual. This is the part he assumed in the plan of our redemption. Hence he is styled *the Spirit of Holiness*; and we are said to be *saved by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour*; and this great work is elsewhere styled, *the Sanctification of the Spirit*, because of his agency in effecting it. But, O! the rich variety of influences the Spirit sheds on his people for this purpose, and the rich variety of graces he forms in them! But does not all this bespeak the value of the soul, for whose sanctification and happiness this glorious provision is made? Yes, surely.

5. *The nature of that happiness which God has provided for the human soul beyond the grave*, bespeaks its high value. It is a happiness derived from the immediate presence and enjoyment of himself; a happiness that flows
from

from the most clear, distinguishing and enlarged views of the perfections, the character, the government, and Christ of God. *There we shall no more see as through a glass darkly, but face to face; we shall no longer know in part, but we shall know even as also we are known.*

The precision and extent of the knowledge of the redeemed of the Lord in glory is expressed, Rev. xxii. 4. *by seeing God's face. And they shall see his face.*

It is a happiness that arises from the most perfect conformity to God, in point of moral purity. The spirits of just men are, in that state, made literally perfect; holy, as God who hath called them is holy. That which is in part is for ever done away, and that which is perfect is now come.

This knowledge of God and conformity to him, are the sources of that enjoyment of him which consummates the happiness of the redeemed of the Lord. For there, in that world,—in that blessed state, *God himself will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, their God.* So the words lie in the original, Rev. xxi. 3. (i. e.) *God himself will be with them, exhibiting and manifesting unto them, as their Supreme blessedness; in all the ways that the several powers of the soul, now arrived at the fullest maturity, both in a natural and moral view, can possibly receive or enjoy him.*

This is that happiness which Christ has purchased for us; and which he has prepared and taken possession of in the name of his people. *Whither the forerunner has for us entered, even Jesus, made an high-priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedec.*

Thus it appears to be a happiness that is derived to us from God *through Christ*, and which is enjoyed in the same heaven of glory he inhabits.—One of his last petitions for his people was, *Father, I will that they also*
whom

whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me. And him the Father always heareth.

Once more, it is a happiness of the same kind with that which the human nature of our Lord himself enjoys. The redeemed of the Lord become at last, *beirs of God, and joint beirs with Christ*. From all which it appears to be a most *perfect* and an *everlasting* happiness,—a happiness equal to our highest capacity of enjoying, and that for ever.—But all this bespeaks the value of the soul, which is capable of this happiness, and for which it is prepared at so expensive a rate, by a wise and gracious God.

6. *The reward God promises and confers upon such as win souls to Christ*, bespeaks their high value.—They who are brought home to God, shall be a crown of glory, and a fruitful source of consolation in the day of Christ, to those who have been the means of their conversion. *For what, saith the Apostle, is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy.*

It requires no small share of wisdom and sagacity to discharge this great trust aright; for *he that winneth souls is wise*. But for their encouragement God promises, *That they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever*. Many and great are the difficulties which lie in the way of the faithful minister's proper discharge of his office; but these rewards are hung up before him as a prize at the end of his course, to encourage him to diligence,—to zeal, and to faithfulness in his work. And even *though Israel be not gathered, yet shall he be glorious in the eyes of the Lord*. But surely God would not so highly encourage the *saking pains* to

save souls, and thus *reward them*, even when they may prove unsuccessful, unless these souls were of infinite value in his sight.

7. *The joy which the conversion of a soul to God occasions in heaven, is no inconsiderable evidence of its high worth in their estimation.*

Our Lord expressly assures us, Luke xv. 7. *That there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth.*—And so important is this truth, and so worthy of our attention, that it is repeated verse 10. *Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.* And to illustrate and confirm this interesting truth, he gives us the instructive parable of the Prodigal Son, in the subsequent part of the chapter. The joy of the father on the return of his son, which concludes the parable, is beautifully illustrative of the Divine and heart-felt pleasure, which the sinner's return to God through Christ spreads through the whole heavenly world,—angels and spirits of just men made perfect.

On the other hand, the conversion of souls is matter of chagrin and mortification to the hosts of hell. And to this, as its true source, are we to ascribe those many and cruel persecutions of one kind and another, that have been raised against the faithful ministers of Jesus in the different ages of the church.—Whatever may be pretended, it is because they are the instruments employed by God, for rescuing souls from the snare of the destroyer. And this malignity of Satan against them is increased by their being successful in this great work.

Thus, the joy of heaven, and the chagrin of hell, upon the sinner's conversion to God, unite in illustrating the value of the human soul.

8. *The solicitude and activity of both worlds, heaven, and hell, about the soul of man, bespeaks its high worth.*

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The one is engaged for its salvation, and the other, with all its accomplices, is intent upon its ruin.

Heaven is engaged for the salvation of the human soul. Agreeably hereto, God has laid a plan for our recovery, as you have already heard under a preceding particular. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each one bears his part therein; and this plan has been not only laid, but executed and revealed in the Sacred oracles, and the great blessings it contains are daily applied to the souls of men, in the administration of the Gospel and its ordinances.

God is in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

Christ, in his mediatorial character, is daily carrying on the great work of our redemption. *Him hath God exalted with his right hand, to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. Who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.*

The Holy Spirit is continually employed in recovering depraved men to the Divine likeness.—The angels of heaven are also employed in the same blessed work. For, *are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation.*

The ministers of Christ too are engaged in the same glorious business. They are *ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.*

Pious friends have their hearts set on the same great end, the salvation of the souls of those who are dear to them. For this they instruct them, advise them, pray for them, and weep over them. In a word, all heaven and all its allies, are employed in the same important work, that of saving souls.

And on the other hand, all hell is busied in destroying precious souls. Hence the devil is styled our *adversary*. *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.* His business, his daily employment is to defeat, to the utmost of his power, the gracious designs of God upon our lost world. In this he is aided by many powerful accomplices. *For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities; against powers; against the rulers of the darkness of this world; against spiritual wickedness in high places.* He is also assisted by thousands of our degenerate race, who enlist under his banner, and powerfully aid him in all his infernal designs, in a variety of ways I may not stay to enumerate.

But why all this solicitude and activity to save, or to destroy the human soul? Verily it is, because it is a prize worth the contending for; a prize worthy the struggles of heaven and hell!

And are these the souls that men in general esteem such things of nought?—about the future happiness of which they are so perfectly indifferent? What folly! what madness! And are there not some of you, my brethren, thus indifferent about your souls? wholly unconcerned about what becomes of them after death? What sayest thou, conscience? And is this rational? Do these souls, these precious souls, merit no more attention than you bestow upon them?—And tell me, ye sons of riot and profaneness, are your stolen pleasures, or your avowed debaucheries, a sufficient compensation for the loss of your rational, immortal souls?—I appeal to your understandings,—I speak as to wise men, judge ye.—I leave the decision with your judgments and consciences; but remember, you are to decide for an eternity. Amen.

S E R M O N XXXII.

THE DANGER OF LOSING THE SOUL.

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MATTHEW xvi. 26.

For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

WE have already considered the value of the soul in a few particulars. Let us now proceed to consider,

II. The *nature* of the loss sustained by those who lose their souls, in the sense of the text.

By the *loss* of the soul here, we are not to understand its annihilation, its ceasing to exist, but its exclusion from God, and its banishment into a state of misery. The loss of which we treat, is not the loss of existence, but

the loss of happiness; and which, considering the nature of the soul, is a much heavier loss than even existence itself; for it would be better not to be, than to be in a state of insupportable and endless misery. And this loss is,

1. An *entire* loss. It is the loss of every thing that can in the least contribute to its comfort; yea, it is the loss of the very *capacity* of enjoying happiness in God, the only possible source of happiness to us after this world is gone. For the person who loses his soul, in the sense of my text, loses every trace of moral goodness, and is in the same state of depravity with the devils themselves. But how affecting a case this! In this world, when a man loses his fortune, he has perhaps his honour left; if he loses both, he may still have his health left; if he loses all these, he may yet have friends; if these too are lost, he may have a God to sweeten all the sorrows of life. But to lose the soul, is to lose *all*; to have nothing left, but an existence in circumstances infinitely worse than non-existence; and what adds to the misery is, that

2. It is an *irreparable* loss.

There are few losses we sustain in this life but may be repaired in a greater or less degree. If a merchant loses by one voyage, he may gain by another; if a farmer loses by one crop, he may gain by another; if we lose one friend, we may get another; and so with a variety of the other blessings of this life. But the man who loses his soul has no possible method of repairing his loss left. In this life, this mediatorial hour, God is upon treating terms with us; but when life is ended, and the soul once lost, there is no method of repair; the treaty of peace is then for ever broken off, and all hope lost. From hence it follows, that it is

3. An *eternal* loss.

The misery it entails shall be commensurate with eternity itself. I am not insensible, my brethren, that there have been some few, now and then, in different ages of the church, who have taught the final restoration of the whole human race to a state of happiness, in some period or other of their existence; and that this sentiment has been lately revived in our land.

Our time does not admit of our entering into a particular consideration of this doctrine, so unfounded in Scripture, and so unfriendly in its tendency to the interests of piety and morality. I shall only make the two following remarks upon it at present.

First, That all agree men must be made *good*, before they can be made *happy*. The reigning power of sin, and happiness in the enjoyment of a God of unstained purity, are, at first sight, utterly incompatible with each other. But how is this goodness to be effected after death? The friends of universal salvation say, by the sinner's suffering in the future world the punishment due to his sins in this. But this takes for granted, what is neither true, nor admitted, that punishment will cure moral evil. It would be no difficult task to shew, that this is neither the nature, the design, nor the tendency of suffering; nor is it in any instance the effect, unless rendered so by the Spirit of grace. The benefits which at any time arise from afflictions, which are readily admitted, flow wholly from this source. They are, at best, but the means in his hand for effecting these good purposes. If punishment works this good effect, we must suppose the devils are at least something better than they were near six thousand years ago when they were cast into the prison of hell. But who supposes they are? Or if any do, what evidence have they that this is the case? You will please also to remember here, that while the sinner is suffering

in the future world the punishment due to his sins in this, he is still sinning in that state, and, therefore, still becoming more depraved, more unlike God, as well as running deeper and deeper in debt to Divine justice. He is, in every view, getting farther and farther from God and true goodness, instead of approaching nearer to them.

I have just hinted what deserves a more particular mention, and what, at the same time, merits your special notice, that the remedy God has provided and revealed in the Gospel, for the cure of moral evil, and the recovery of the soul to true goodness, and the *only* remedy is the Spirit of God.

You have already heard, in a preceding discourse, that this was the interesting part he took in the plan of our salvation through a Mediator; and that agreeably to this, the renovation and the sanctification of the human heart, are uniformly ascribed to him, and to him *alone*, in the Sacred Oracles. To be regenerated is to be *born of the Spirit*; and the after progress of this good work in the soul is *the sanctification of the Spirit*, because effected by him. To ascribe, therefore, this good work to the efficacy of suffering, is highly derogatory from the honour of the Spirit, as the Spirit of Holiness; it is to ascribe that to inferior causes that can only be effected by his Almighty arm; and to give the glory to the creature, which is due alone to the Creator.

The *second* remark is, that the declarations of God in his word, are most pointed and express against the doctrine of an universal restoration; or, in other words, they teach us, that the misery of the wicked in the future world, will be *everlasting*. Among the numerous instances of this kind I shall only mention the following.

Our Lord, in that brief but instructive account of the judgment of the great day, which you have in the 25th chapter

chapter of Matthew, from the 31st verse, introduces the Judge as addressing the righteous in the following language: *Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.* And the wicked he addresses in the words that follow: *Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into EVERLASTING FIRE, prepared for the devil and his angels.* And he concludes the whole account thus: *And these shall go away into EVERLASTING PUNISHMENT, but the righteous into life eternal.*

My brethren, it is necessary you should be informed here, that the words in this last verse, the one in the first clause, which teaches us the duration of the misery of the wicked, and that in the last clause, which teaches us the duration of the happiness of the righteous, which all agree to be eternal, are precisely the same in the original language. Can any then suppose the Saviour, the leading trait of whose character, upon all occasions, was undissembled faithfulness, would use the same words in the same verse in two different senses, nay, in *opposite* senses, on a subject of such infinite moment to the souls of men, as the final issue of the general judgment, without giving the least hint of it? That in the one case he should mean a limited time, and in the other an endless eternity, and yet conceal these different meanings under the veil of the most profound secrecy and silence? How could such conduct be reconciled with common honesty? But this must be the case upon the principles of the friends of universal salvation. For nothing can be more express and unequivocal than the declaration of our Lord, that the misery of the wicked shall be of the same duration with the happiness of the righteous, and that both the one and the other shall be EVERLASTING.

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You will please to observe further, that these two states are contrasted with each other in the text before us, and contrasted in this very point of view, as to their *duration*. This appears from the face of the words, *These shall go away into EVERLASTING PUNISHMENT, but the righteous into life eternal.*

To say the nature of the subject suggests the different senses, in which we are to understand the original word here used, though our Lord gives no hint of it, is begging the question. This is the very thing that is denied, and which has never yet been proved.

I shall only add, we are assured in 2 Thessalonians, i. 9. *That the wicked shall be punished with EVERLASTING destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.* This is that which infuses the bitter ingredient, despair, into the cup of JEHOVAH's indignation. No hope—no hope—no hope through an endless eternity.

III. I am to consider the *danger* of thus losing the soul.

This danger is great, and arises from various sources; but all our time admits of at present, is briefly to touch upon the few following:

1. The *state* in which we are *by nature*.

The Sacred Oracles uniformly represent this as a state of spiritual death. *And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.* Every soul, by reason of sin, is, *in a sense*, in a lost state already, that is, they have lost the favour of God; they are, *by nature*, children of wrath. They have lost the image of God. *Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.* From the former arises the necessity

of

of being justified freely by God's grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ; and from the latter, the necessity of being renewed in the spirit of our mind. Agreeably to this, every unbelieving sinner is represented as under an actual sentence of condemnation to suffer the pains of eternal fire. *He that believeth not is condemned already; because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.*

You will therefore perceive, that it is only for sinners to continue in that state, unpardoned and unrenewed and they are inevitably lost to all eternity; and the danger there is, that they may continue in this state, appears,

2. From the many obstructions that lie in the sinner's way to a recovery to the favour and image of God. I cannot stay to enumerate these, much less to illustrate them at large in this place. I shall only mention the following: The blindness of the human mind; the estrangement of the heart from God; nay more, its enmity against him; the unfaithfulness of the conscience; and the various depravity of the affections; all these are properly of an internal nature; they are obstructions that arise from ourselves. But besides these, such is the power and influence Satan, the adversary of our souls, has in obstructing the sinner's recovery to God, and affecting his ruin, that he is styled the *Prince of this world*. *For the prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in me:* And also, *the God of this world*. *In whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.* He is, for his cunning, called *the Old Serpent*, and, for his malice, *the Devil and Satan*.

Now,

Now, when you consider the power, the cunning, the malice, and the industry of Satan and his accomplices, that are continually employed in ruining the souls of men, the danger of their being lost is greatly heightened.

Again, This world is another fruitful source of obstructions in the sinner's way to eternal life.—The corrupt opinions of the world, its vicious examples, its smiles, its frowns, its necessary and lawful cares, its riches, its honours, its amusements, with all its various pleasures, lawful and unlawful, all, *all* contribute, by reason of our depravity, to heighten the sinner's danger of losing his soul.

3. This danger appears from the *many ways in* and *by* which the soul may be lost. The principal of these are, ignorance of God, and of spiritual and eternal things, carnal security, and indifference respecting the salvation of our souls, a presuming on the absolute mercy of God, without proper regard had to the atonement of Christ, hypocrisy and formality in religion, the imbibing of such false principles as are incompatible with gospel-holiness, particularly the principles of infidelity, the neglecting of God's public ordinances, which never fails, if persisted in, to issue in the ruin of the soul; procrastination, or putting off the business of our souls to some future time; this is the usual, and, alas! too frequent bane of youth; to which we may add, the many ways of open profaneness, such as drunkenness, uncleanness in all its various forms, cursing and profane swearing, lying, dishonesty in dealing with each other, sabbath-breaking, contempt of God and sacred things, with every other species of vice; all and each of these may be considered as so many different paths which lead down to the chambers of eternal death; some more secret, and some more open; and which

serve to illustrate the danger of losing the soul; which danger is not a little heightened by the consideration of the immediate and fatal influence some of these things must have, from their very nature, upon the ruin of the soul.

4. This danger appears from the *great difficulty of recovering the soul from all these evils.*

Nothing less can effect it than the almighty arm of God, and to this it is uniformly ascribed in the Sacred Oracles. The bent of the soul, by nature, is against its own recovery, as appears from the internal obstructions in the way to it already mentioned.

The case of the sinner may be justly compared to that of a person deprived of his reason, who refuses to use the means prescribed for his recovery, however judicious; or who counteracts them to the utmost of his power, or both. The charge of our Lord against the Jews of old, is equally just with respect to every unbelieving sinner under the gospel. *Ye will not come unto me that ye may have life.* And besides this, all earth and all hell are opposed to the sinner's recovery to God, as you have heard in its place. If ever, therefore, it be effected, it must be by the arm of the LORD GOD OF HOSTS.—And now put all these considerations together, and yourselves being judges, is not the danger of losing your precious souls great?

But it is time I should finish the subject by a few practical reflections upon what has been said. And you will easily perceive, that,

1. Whether we consider the value of the soul, the nature of the ruin to which it is exposed, or the danger it is in of falling into this ruin, all conspire to teach us the evil nature of sin, that sin which exposes this precious
soul

soul to all this ruin.—My brethren, sin is not that trifling men in general esteem it. It has lost us the Divine favour, and justly exposed us to the displeasure of heaven; it has lost us the Divine image, and rendered us wholly unfit for the enjoyment of the God of holiness; it is the procuring cause of all the numerous and complicated evils of this life.—*For as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.*

“If every individual of our race,” says a pious divine, “that has ever existed, from Adam down to our day, were collected into one mighty heap, and an inquest held up on them, sin would be found to be the murderer.” But this is not all; for we are assured, that those who persist in the ways of sin, *shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.*—Must it not then be an evil and a bitter thing to sin against the Lord. Would to God that I could impress each one of you, and my own soul with yours, with a proper sense of the evil and destructive nature thereof, that we might be hereby excited to hate it in a suitable manner, to turn from it to God through his Son Jesus Christ, and to maintain a careful and constant guard against it.

2. How indebted are we to rich grace for a Saviour from the ruin, which the loss of these precious souls involves?—a ruin of which we are in so much danger. God might have passed by our race as he passed by the fallen angels, and have left us to perish in our unnatural rebellion against him, as he left them. But O! the riches of redeeming love! Having laid his plan in the eternal councils of peace, he was pleased to execute it in the fulness of time, by *sending his Son* into our world, *made of*

a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of children. Herein, indeed, is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. And let Gethsemane tell—let the scenes of infamy and insult, through which the Saviour passed, from thence to mount Calvary, tell—and let Calvary itself, and the cross tell, what the price of our redemption cost the Son of God. Here is love that many waters could not quench! Love that all the billows of Jehovah's wrath could not drown! Love stronger than death!—My brethren, let this love of God and his Son Christ, constrain you to estimate your souls in a proper manner, and flee from the wrath to come, upon the plan of the gospel.

3. This subject teaches us the precious nature of the ordinances of the Gospel. I particularly mean here the institutions of God's public worship on the Sabbath, the word and sacrament. These are the means he has instituted and ordained for the recovery of lost souls to the Divine favour, and their restoration to his holy image. *For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe.* And you elsewhere read, *that faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.* The great truths taught in the faithful preaching of the word, and in the administration of the Gospel-sacraments, are the means the Holy Spirit uses for these gracious purposes; they are the means by which he effects and promotes that change in the heart and life, in which Gospel-holiness consist; and the duties there taught are the guide of the Christian's life.

I beseech you, therefore, my brethren, that you estimate these ordinances of God—these institutions of mercy,

cy, in a suitable manner; adore God for them—rejoice in them as your inestimable privilege—make conscience of attending upon them from Sabbath to Sabbath; but above all, see that you improve them for the great purposes of your personal purity, your comfort in the ways of God, and for holding a delightful intercourse with the Father of your spirits while here upon earth, that you may be prepared for dwelling with him in glory.

4. We are taught by this subject the solemn nature of the charge committed to those who have the care of souls.—This is the charge of Gospel-ministers. Hence that apostolic injunction: *Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give an account; that they may do it with joy, and not with grief, for that is unprofitable for you.* The value of the souls committed to their care, shews the importance of the charge. They are of more worth than a world. *For what is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or, what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*

It farther appears from the high danger sinners are in of losing these souls, as already illustrated, and from the awful nature of the loss when sustained. All these unite in shewing the necessity of watchfulness, diligence and faithfulness in the ministers of Jesus Christ. I beseech you then, my brethren, let us have your pity and your prayers, your countenance and your assistance in the discharge of our great trust. *Be ye helpers together by prayer for us.*

Parents also have a solemn charge in the souls of their children, and masters and mistresses in the souls of their servants. Be entreated then to instruct them with care—to watch over them—to pray for them and with them—

and

and to set an example of piety and good morals before them.

I only add once more,

5. The important truths you have heard, loudly call upon sinners to awake out of their security—to shake off their sloth—to seek the Lord while he may be found, and to call upon him while he is near.—Think, O think of the numerous and probable ways by which men may lose their precious souls, and by which they are daily losing them, and that for ever!—And is there no danger of your losing your souls, in some one or other of these ways? Pause a moment upon this important question! It is too important to be trifled with, and too interesting to be delayed! Your souls—your precious souls are at stake!

These truths also call upon profane sinners of every class and description to break off their sins by repentance, and turn unto the living God, through his Son Jesus Christ. They address you, O sinners! in the following authoritative, yet tender language of inspiration. *Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.—How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorers delight in their scorning? and fools hate knowledge. Turn ye at my reproof; behold I will pour out my Spirit unto you—I will make known my words unto you. As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel!*

Do not wonder that the ministers of Jesus address you with solemnity and tenderness—that they mingle tears with their entreaties, when beseeching sinners to have mercy upon their precious souls. Indifference in such a case would be the height of absurdity in us, and the great-

est cruelty to you. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. And may this be the effect of the present address, through the riches of free grace in Christ our Lord, Amen and Amen.

S E R.

SERMON XXXIV*.

SANCTUARY BLESSINGS.

BY

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EXODUS XX. 24.

*In all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee
and bless thee.*

A SAVIOUR was early revealed. Immediately after the fall the promise was given to our first parents, in a short, but very comprehensive sentence against the serpent. *I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.* This was afterwards gradually unfolded through all the preparatory discoveries of succeeding

* This Sermon was preached, July 4. 1790, in the New or Middle Dutch Church, which had been ruined during the war, and having been repaired, was that day dedicated anew to the service of God.

ceeding ages, and its important meaning illustrated by many additional declarations, which all pointed to the blessed Redeemer.

A character so singular and eminent, ought to be fully ascertained by every mark of distinction. His church must know at his coming for what end he appeared, and be able to discriminate him from all others. To answer this purpose, the wisdom of God is conspicuous, in separating Israel as a particular nation, to preserve the truths of revelation, and be the peculiar people from whom the Saviour, as to the flesh, was to spring, *who is God over all, blessed for ever more.*

But to set apart a nation, in such a manner as to prevent a mixture with the rest of mankind, and answer the great designs respecting the Messiah, it was necessary a government should be constituted of a very singular kind; a government which would bind the conscience in religion, as well as the conduct in civil affairs; a government in which the church and state would be perfectly incorporated, and the members of both societies become united under the same code of laws. This could only be done by a *theocracy*. No human constitution could possibly effect it.—The sacred rights of conscience can never be delegated by any people to their rulers; nor can the magistrate assume the prerogative of enforcing uniformity in doctrines or worship, without injustice and tyranny.

Fifty days after the departure of the children of Israel from Egypt, they arrived at Mount Sinai. There the covenant was formally ratified between God and them, and their government completely organized. On that occasion an august display of the Divine presence was made, superior to any that was ever before exhibited on earth, or will probably be again, until the Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel,

archangel, and with the trump of God. *There were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud, and Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke; because the Lord descended upon it in fire, and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly.*

From the midst of this tremendous scene, the sum of the moral law was aloud proclaimed to Israel. The remaining parts of the legislation, at the express request of the people, were communicated to Moses first, and by him brought down to them. The words of the text, which follow shortly after the ten commandments, are a promise annexed to the law which respected the altar. *An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, thy sheep and thine oxen: In all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee, and bless thee.* A gracious promise! calculated to direct the Israelites to an acceptable service, and encourage them to persevere in their faith and worship; but a promise which refers to the church under the New-Testament dispensation as much as to that under the Old.—There is but one Saviour, and one covenant of grace, whereby sinners can obtain eternal life.—There is also but one church, founded on that covenant, however various it may have been in its outward forms. Whatever was, therefore, an essential promise of that covenant to Israel, is equally so to us; and, in this extent, I shall now consider the text.

There is, perhaps, no passage in the Sacred Oracles more applicable to our present situation, or better suited to excite in your minds proper exercises upon this solemn occasion. *In all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee and bless thee.* Words replete with instruction and comfort! Words which clearly determine what con-

stitutes a true church, and what blessings we may hope to obtain in the sanctuary! Confident as I am of your usual attention, I need not fear trespassing upon your patience, while I discuss a subject, in which you are deeply interested, and for meditating upon which, with eager expectations, you are now expressly come. The Lord bear witness to his own word, and make it the first-fruits of a plentiful harvest in this house! To understand the text, it will be necessary to know,

I. What is meant by *recording the name of the Lord in any place*. And then,

II. The import of the promise, *I will come unto thee and bless thee*. Both these, in a humble dependence upon Divine aid, I purpose to explain and apply.

First, I must shew you what is meant by the Lord's recording his name in any place. God has not left himself without a witness. *The invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead*. The brightest evidence of his existence and attributes, are engraven on every object around us. *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth forth his handywork*. But something particular is designed in the text. The *name* of the Lord is mentioned with singular emphasis; and some *places* are distinguished from others, by their relation to that name.

1. With respect to the *former*; by the NAME OF THE LORD is often understood God himself, or the display of his infinite perfections in those works, whereby he makes his being and nature known.—Thus, Psalm xx. 1. *The Lord bear thee in the day of trouble, the name of the God of Jacob defend thee*. So, Psalms xxix. 2. xxxiv. 3.—

1 Tim.

1 Tim. vi. 1. And thus also in the third precept of the decalogue:—*Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.* But the NAME of the Lord, when used in a particular reference to the covenant of grace, always respects God considered as a REDEEMER; and expresses his divine perfections, as they are gloriously displayed in the salvation of sinners. This is ascertained from that memorable passage in the 34th chapter of Exodus, where the Lord is said to have proclaimed his name to Moses. *And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the NAME OF THE LORD; and the Lord passed by before him and proclaimed, the LORD, the LORD God merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgressions, and sins, and will by no means clear the guilty.*

This was the blessed name implied in the first promise of a Saviour in paradise, and was the only foundation on which the worship of sinners could be built. In the earliest ages of the world it was thus understood, *Then began men to call upon the name of the Lord.* As soon as their numbers were sufficiently increased, they began, as a church, in a public manner, to worship the Lord as a GOD OF SALVATION, through the promised Messiah.

The knowledge and profession of this sacred name continued in the world, until infidelity and wickedness had gradually effaced the truths of revelation, and threatened, at last, wholly to extirpate the worship of God. Noah, who was a preacher, and heir of the righteousness which is by faith, preserved the treasure. He conveyed it to his posterity, who survived the flood; and revealed religion was universally acknowledged, until ignorance and enmity a second time made a formidable opposition, and man-

kind began again to degenerate into idolatry and profaneness.

The calling of Abraham, and entailing the promise upon his family, secured the doctrines of grace, and perpetuated the true worship of God. To that patriarch the Lord confirmed his name.—*Fear not Abram, I am thy shield and exceeding great reward.—I am GOD ALMIGHTY, a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee.* Upon the separation of Abraham to a special interest in the promise, two great privileges were granted to him, the first was, that, according to the flesh, he should be the father of the Messiah, who was the life of the covenant, the origin and cause of all the blessings contained therein. The second was, That the faith of Abraham, whereby he became personally interested in the covenant, should be a pattern of the faith of the church in all generations; so that none should ever be real members, or partake of its blessings, but by the same faith which Abraham exercised. It is upon account of this, that *he is the father of all them that believe*, and the *beir of the world*. It is in this respect that, in the covenant made with him, the basis of the church, for all future ages, was fixed. Wherever that covenant is established, and with whomsoever it is confirmed, there is a church, and to them all its essential privileges appertain.

It was the distinguished happiness of Israel to enjoy these privileges. Notwithstanding the frequent instances of depravity in that nation, there were always some, and often many among them, who possessed the faith of their father Abraham, and inherited the blessings of the covenant. Previous to the departure of the people from Egypt, the NAME OF THE LORD was expressly made known and explained, as the foundation of the whole Mosaic economy. *And Moses said unto God, Behold, when*

I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, the God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say unto me, What is his name? What shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: And he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. And God said, moreover, unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, the Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob hath sent me unto you: this is MY NAME for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations. Of this Israel was again admonished, Exodus xxiii. 20, 21—with which compare 2 Cor. iv. 6. It was also enjoined upon the high-priests continually to put that name, by their very forms of blessing, upon the people, Numb. vi. 27.

There is no necessity of detaining you with any observations upon the particular titles by which it hath pleased God to distinguish himself in the Old or New Testament. The word JEHOVAH is the most expressive, and is absolutely incommunicable. It denotes his essential and independent being, and has an immediate relation to the covenant of grace. It points, with all the others, to the same important centre, and designates the Supreme as a reconciled God in the Mediator. This is the sum and scope of Divine revelation. *This is his name, and this is his memorial.* Believers, under the old dispensation, considered it in that light. When they mentioned the name of the Lord as a plea, or an invocation in prayer, they comprised, what we now intend by naming the Redeemer, or calling upon God, as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. All, therefore, that is implied in the redemption of sinners, and which is, perhaps, expressed in fewest words, by saying with the Psalmist, Psal. lxxviii. 19. that God is THE GOD OF OUR SALVATION, is meant in the text.

text. This is the name here designed,—a name much forgotten or corrupted among other nations, but manifested to Israel as the great object of their faith and worship, and committed to them as a deposit of infinite value.

2. Let us now see in what respects that name may be said to BE RECORDED in any place.

The words might be rendered, *in all places where I shall fix the memory of my name*; or, *in all places where I shall make my name to be invoked*. The Chaldaic paraphrase has it, *in every place where I shall make my majesty to dwell*. The phrase, agreeably to either of these translations, evidently refers to the public worship of God, and has respect both to the *place* when, and the *manner* in which it was to be celebrated. The blessing was not discriminately located in every spot where any of the tribes might determine to fix a sanctuary; nor did God promise to be propitious to every kind of worship they might choose to celebrate, but only to such place as he should designate, and such worship as should be performed according to his appointment.

It is well known, that the tabernacle was the *place* of public worship, which God, exclusively of all others, determined for the Israelites while they were in the wilderness. After they had possession of the promised land, the ark of the covenant was lodged at Shiloh, and there, for a long while, the people celebrated divine service. When the temple was finished, Jerusalem was fixed upon as the permanent seat. To that place the tribes were obliged to go up, and thrice every year all the males were there to appear before the Lord. After the captivity in Babylon, the privileges of the sanctuary were again restored. A second temple was built by Zerubbabel, and

Israel

Israel continued to worship at Jerusalem until the Messiah came.

If you now enquire, *how* the name of the Lord was RECORDED in all these places, and by what means it might be said that he made himself to be there remembered as the God of Salvation? we refer you, for a general answer, to the genius and scope of the Mosaic institution. The covenant of Sinai, that whole dispensation was not only subordinate to the covenant of grace, but it had an immediate respect to the Messiah, and was subservient to his coming. The types and ceremonies,—the religious rites, and all the various parts of their worship were instituted of God himself, for the express purpose of confirming the faith of his church; and they all pointed to the blessed Jesus as the end of the law. By these, therefore, the name of the Lord was recorded in Israel, and the worship performed in the sanctuary, served to perpetuate the memory of Jehovah as the God of Salvation.

But this great end was more *especially* attained by the SACRIFICES and burnt-offerings, which formed an essential part of the daily worship in Israel. Abstractly considered, and without any reference to the Divine appointment, there is, indeed, nothing instructive, or even rational, in spilling the blood of a beast, or offering either the vegetable or animal creation as a part of religious service.—It is easy for infidels, upon the subject, to shew their enmity against revealed religion, by arguing: “The
“ extreme folly of supposing God should ever be pleased
“ with the mere waste of his own productions; or, in the
“ case of animal sacrifice, in particular, should consider as
“ an act of acceptable religion, the destruction of a life, of
“ which he had so exquisitely provided for the continu-
“ ance. That, while the very idea of a Divine Being
“ implies in it such a superior excellence of nature, as to be
“ wholly

“ wholly out of the reach of our good offices, the general
“ notion of sacrificing is altogether as extraordinary as it
“ appears to have been universal in the world.” But how-
ever strange and improper sacrifices may appear to superficial
observers; yet, when they are considered as commanded of God, and calculated to represent and confirm
the great benefits he designed to confer upon sinners,
through the Saviour, they must be acknowledged to be a
rational and divine service. They cannot, it is true, be
ingrafted by the religion of nature into the worship of
sinless creatures. Had man not fallen, a victim had never
bled. The idea of an expiation, where there is no
guilt, is incompatible. But the religion of sinners is
founded upon the relation they sustain to God as their
Redeemer. They cannot approach him without a Me-
diator, and the intervention of an atonement. A sacri-
fice, therefore, either in the type or archetype, is abso-
lutely essential in their worship. It was a consciousness of
guilt which prompted the desire of satisfying Divine ju-
stice by some offering, or rather a tradition respecting the
Saviour, which was the source of sacrifices among the
heathen nations, and the practice cannot be accounted for
upon any other principle. But in Israel, where the
truths of revelation were preserved, and sacrifices had the
sanction of a new and immediate appointment, they con-
stituted a noble and instructive part of divine worship.
Believers were then looking for the appearance of the
promised seed, who was not yet come. What could be
better calculated to assist their faith, to establish their hope,
and instruct them in the method of salvation, than to be
commanded of God to substitute a bloody offering in their
own stead, and thus transfer the legal guilt and punish-
ment upon a sacrifice? In this act of worship, the bleed-
ing lamb and smoking altar directed them to the promised

Surety, the precious Lamb of God, who, by his sufferings and death, was fully to atone for his people, and, by one perfect sacrifice, became the author of salvation unto all that obey him. Thus, by the manner in which the solemn worship was celebrated in those places, the Lord recorded his name in Israel as a God of Salvation. In this way the saints of the Old Testament dispensation had their graces drawn into exercise. They lived by faith; and the Apostle, in his epistle to the Hebrews, assures us, that they also *died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, they were persuaded of them, and embraced them.*

When the Messiah came, a new dispensation commenced. The object for setting apart a distinct nation, under a theocracy, was fully obtained. The necessity of a singular government no longer existed. The separating wall was consequently broken down, and the peculiarities of the Mosaic worship and polity were totally abrogated. Now there is no distinction of nations, nor is there any place particularly assigned by Divine appointment for public worship. *The hour cometh, said our Lord to the woman of Samaria, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father; the hour cometh and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship him.* Wherever the people of God unite in spiritual worship, the blessing is secured. *Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.* A gracious word! which reaches to every place where his children may be engaged in the duties of religion; and extends the text in its fullest import, to the churches under the New Testament dispensation, as much as formerly, to the tabernacle or temple; to Shiloh or Jerusalem.

But

But what constitutes a church within the meaning of the text? The mere assumption of the title, without possessing the essentials requisite to give existence to a true church, will surely not suffice. It is possible to have the form of godliness, and yet to deny the power thereof. It is possible to retain the name, and yet to depart even from the form so far, that little or nothing of the doctrine or worship peculiar to Christianity is found.—This renders it necessary to enquire, what it is *records* the name of the Lord in any place of worship under the New Testament, and by what unerring characteristic such a place may be distinguished from all others? Let it suffice upon this important and extensive enquiry, in order to reduce it to the limits of the present hour, to reply, *first*, in a negative view, that the name of the Lord, under the present economy, is *not* recorded by types and shadows, the sacrifices and legal ordinances which formerly constituted a proper and acceptable service. *The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.* A free, a filial, and a spiritual worship, is most suitable to the privilege and dignity of the New Testament church. Again, it is not any exclusive national establishment, or the partial favour of civil rulers, that can constitute a church. Denominations, in principle and worship very contrary to each other, have been adopted in different nations, without obtaining thereby the least weight in the scale of truth, or becoming the church of Christ, because they were the church of the magistrate. An union between the church and state, however artfully contrived to suit the genius of civil government, or ingeniously defended to apologize for usurped privileges, is, under the present dispensation, absurd and impossible,—it is of human invention, and has often prostituted the most sacred things, by making them subservient to mere political

political views, to avarice, or the lust of domination. Again, it is not the magnificence of a building, the shew of wealth, or any ostentatious ceremonies, which can record the name of the Lord among a people. The house is not the church, and parade is not worship. These may all originate from improper principles, and be monuments of pride and superstition, instead of an acceptable service in spirit and in truth. Lastly, it is not a worship dictated solely by the religion of nature, or the legal spirit of the covenant of works, without an immediate and particular regard to the blessed Mediator, that can possibly commemorate the God of Salvation. Whatever the distinguishing truths of the Gospel are omitted, or slightly passed over, and social duties, however important and necessary, are only inculcated to the neglect of what we owe to God, and to the Saviour; there the most essential and constituent parts of a New Testament church are wanting; and such places of worship are not within the promise of the text. The name of the Lord is not recorded there.

But, in a positive view, if you enquire in what it consists, or where it may be said the Sacred name under the New Testament is recorded? we reply, it is there where the doctrines of grace, and what essentially relates to the salvation of sinners, through the imputed righteousness of the precious Saviour, are firmly believed and openly professed. It is there where these truths are plainly and boldly preached by the ministers of the Gospel, and Divine worship is conducted upon evangelical principles. A crucified Jesus; and eternal life in him, constitute the glad tidings of great joy. To be renewed by the Holy Spirit, to repent of sin, and believe in the Son of God, are the great requisitions and promises of the Gospel; and self-denial, humility, and holiness, in all its branches,

branches, are the fruits of that faith which works by love, and purifies the heart. Where these truths are faithfully taught, and where these things are experienced and practised, there is a church. There the name of the Lord, as a God of Salvation, is recorded. A church thus constituted, although attended by the poor; although assembled in a building destitute of colonnades, engravings and ornaments, is more glorious, more acceptable in the sight of God than the most stately temple, and illustrious audience, where these doctrines are not honoured. To this permit me to add, (and the bare mention of them must suffice), the due administration of the sacraments, and an impartial use of the keys of discipline, in excluding unworthy members. Wherever all these are found, whether in a thronged city or a waste forest, amongst the highest or the lowest ranks of society; there God will meet with his humble supplicants, and make them joyful in his house of prayer. To such worshippers the promise in the text is made, and to all such places he will come and bless his people.

Before we proceed to consider the precious promise, it deserves our notice, upon this first part of the subject, that while the things we have been speaking of are to be viewed as matters of duty, with respect to us, they are primarily to be considered as originating wholly from God, and must be received as his gift. I record my name, saith the Lord.—And it is so,—it is of his sovereign good-will that a Saviour is provided for fallen men, and not for fallen angels. It is of the Lord that there is a church preserved on earth, notwithstanding all the opposition of the gates of hell; and it must be ascribed to his grace, that in any place, and among any people, his truths are faithfully preached, and spiritual worship is celebrated. I might add, it is of him that a
people

people find a pure desire to build a house for his service; and it is he, in his good providence, who puts it in the power of their hands to finish the work. *Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it.* But let us attend to the promise, and consider,

II. The import of these words, *I will come unto thee, and bless thee.*

The blessing of the Lord is always upon his people in every place. He hears their prayers in secret, and in their families. He has never said to the seed of Jacob, *seek ye me in vain.* But to public worship peculiar mercies are annexed. *He loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. For the Lord hath chosen Zion;—he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever,—here will I dwell, for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread. I will also clothe her priests with salvation, and her saints shall shout aloud for joy.* The ordinances of his house are positive institutions for promoting his glory in the world. These he has appointed as the ordinary means for converting sinners, and edifying his saints; and these, in an especial manner, he will own and bless.

I. I WILL COME;—this is the promise: *I will come where I record my name.* God is never absent;—*he compasseth our path and our lying down, and is acquainted with all our ways. He is not far from every one of us, for in him we live, and move, and have our being.* He is no local Deity, like those of the idolatrous heathen. He is confined to no spot;—the heaven is his throne, and the earth is his footstool. All nature is his temple;—all space his abode;—every living thing is the workmanship of his hands, and his providential care and tender mercies extend over all his creatures. But he is near to his people in a sense more exalted, than the ordinary cares of Pro-

vidence imply. He is their reconciled God and Father; they are his chosen whom he loves;—his treasure;—his jewels; a people formed for himself, to shew forth his glory. He is said, therefore, in the style of Scripture, to *come* to his church, because he *there* gives the most distinguishing proofs of his gracious presence, and exhibits the most unequivocal evidences of his love and Divine approbation. Remarkable to this purpose are the promises with respect both to the tabernacle and the temple. In relation to the former, see Exodus xxix. 43, 44, 45. *And there I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by my glory. I will sanctify the tabernacle of the congregation and the altar: I will sanctify also both Aaron and his sons, to minister to me in the priest's office. And I will dwell amongst the children of Israel, and will be their God.* In regard to the latter, 2 Chron. vii. 12.—15, 16. *And the Lord appeared to Solomon by night, and said unto him, I have heard thy prayer, and have chosen this place to myself for an house of sacrifice. Now mine eyes shall be open, and mine ears attend unto the prayer that is made in this place. For now have I chosen and sanctified this house, that my name may be there for ever, and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually.*

A cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night, were tokens of the Divine protection to the whole camp of Israel. These directed the people in the wilderness where to bend their course, and when to pitch their tents. But the ark of the covenant, with the mercy-seat between the cherubims, were the AUGUST SYMBOLS of the more immediate presence of God in the sanctuary. Under the New Testament, agreeably to the present spiritual œconomy, the Divine presence is not accompanied with such visible emblems; but it is not the less real, efficacious and comfortable. In both dispensations, *the name*

of

of the city remains JEHOVAH SHAMMAH, *the Lord is there.* The blessed Redeemer, since his resurrection and triumphant ascension, is no more on earth, with respect to his human nature; but with respect to his Godhead, Majesty, Grace and Spirit, he is at no time absent from us. At his departure he said, *Lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.*—And it is even so. The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, still holds the stars of his church in his right hand, and *walks in the midst of the golden candlesticks.* The springs of Zion are all in him; and glorious things for ever continue to be spoken of the city of God;—the Highest himself shall establish her, and God is known in her palaces for a refuge. All this is implied in the text before us, and expressed in one general term,—**I WILL BLESS THEE.** Let us examine this second part of the promise.

2. The blessing here intended cannot refer to sensual enjoyments, nor mean the riches, pleasures and comforts of this life. Our Emmanuel holds out no Mahometan paradise to his followers, nor is his kingdom of this world. The church of God is formed on nobler principles, and for higher purposes.—Blessings of a superior nature are in store for her. *The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.* Great peace have all they who love his law; but they may, nevertheless, suffer great tribulation, and be exposed to many afflictions here.—Under the theocracy, civil and domestic mercies were promised; but these were only the appendages of the covenant of grace suited to that dispensation, and constituted no part of its essential benefits. The promise in the text refers principally to **SANCTUARY BLESSINGS**: Those great and good things before mentioned, for the obtaining of which the ordinances of the sanctuary were especially instituted.

That the Lord conferred these blessings upon his church under the Old Testament, is evident from his word. Notwithstanding the provocations of Israel, and the severe judgments which their sins very frequently brought upon them; yet he remembered his covenant, and his presence was not wholly removed. The oracles of truth were preserved inviolate, and spiritual Israel, the elect people of God in each succeeding generation, were converted, comforted, and finally saved. When the old dispensation had done its work, it resigned over to the new, the memory of the Sacred name, and a glorious ERA commenced. Zion rejoiced in her sudden prosperity, and became invested with extensive blessings. What these blessings are, as they refer to us, is of more importance now to ascertain.

The Apostle sums up the whole, in saying to the Ephesians, *He hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings, in heavenly places, in Christ Jesus.* And with respect to sanctuary privileges, he asserts the superior excellency of the New Testament above the Old, to the Corinthians. *If the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. The veil is done away in Christ, and we all with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord; are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.* The borders of Zion are now enlarged;—the church is no longer as a child under age, but enjoys a glorious liberty;—access is opened *into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,—by a new and living way which he hath consecrated for us.* Believers obtain the nearest approach to heaven, which on this side of the world of spirits, will or can be granted.—The New Testament is the last and highest economy of grace, and its holy institutions are

amply fitted to prepare the saints for the immediate vision and fruition of God in glory.

But it is necessary to descend to particulars, and enquire, with respect to Gospel-churches, "when the Lord may be said to bless his people where his name is recorded," agreeably to the import of the text? Without enumerating all the mercies comprised in the promise, let it suffice to answer:

1. The Lord blesses his churches, when he gives them a pure and faithful MINISTRY;—when he raises up men, who have experienced the power of truth upon their own hearts; who believe what they preach, and shudder at making the pulpit the theatre of their own praise, or private interest.—He sends a blessing when he sends labourers into his harvest, who, unbiaſſed by worldly fears and hopes, continue resolute in every part of duty, inflexibly honest, and exemplary in their conversation. Such men were promised: *I will give you pastors according to my heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding. Thine eyes shall see thy teachers.* Such men are blessings to the churches. By taking heed to themselves, and all the flock, they hold forth the word of life with the prospect of success, and will have cause to rejoice in the day of Christ, that they have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain. It is by the ministry of men, it pleases God to call sinners to his communion, and accomplish his designs of love. He has committed the treasure of the Gospel into earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may appear to be from him. The gifts therefore for the ministry, which the exalted Saviour bestowed from his throne, are represented by the Apostle, as a principal blessing conferred upon the church. *When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men. He gave some Apostles,*

and some Prophets, and some Evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

2. The Lord blesses his church when, in his good Providence, he preserves his people together in mutual PEACE, and prevents confusion, animosities and schisms. *Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity; it is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard, that went down to the skirts of his garments. As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion; for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for ever more.*

3. But especially he blesses his people in the place where he records his name, when he bestows that blessing of all blessings, the HOLY SPIRIT.—*When he powers water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground. Then the light of Zion breaks forth as the morning, and her health springs forth speedily. The wilderness is glad; the desert rejoices, and blossoms as the rose. This brings the truth with power to the consciences of sinners—alarms the careless and profane, and directs them, agreeably to the written word, to fly for refuge to the hope set before them. This establishes his own people in their most holy faith—calls forth their graces into exercise, and enables them to adorn the doctrines they profess, by a holy life and conversation. He comes with a blessing, when he breathes upon the slain, that they may live; when he makes his house a Bethel, administers consolation to his mourners, and grants them fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. These, and what is inseparably connected with these, constitute the principal blessings conferred in the sanctuary. Thus his children, who are born in Zion, are fed by the ordinances, as in green pastures.*

pastures. Thus they are enabled to go from strength to strength, until they shall appear without spot or wrinkle, prepared to join the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven. But I must not omit,

4. The PROTECTION AND DEFENCE of the Most High, whereby he preserves his churches in the enjoyment of their privileges, and continues his blessing from the fathers to the children. *The Lord will create upon every dwelling place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for upon all the glory shall be a defence.—This shall be written for the generation to come, and the people which shall be created shall praise the Lord. The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee.* While his name continues to be faithfully recorded, his churches may expect the continuation of the blessing. But if they become luke-warm, if they depart from the faith, or degenerate into immoral practices, they have reason to fear a suspension, if not a total loss of the promised mercies: And wo to a people when God departs from them! The message brought by Azariah the son of Obed, is replete with instruction, and very alarming. *Hear ye me Acha, and all Judah and Benjamin; the Lord is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if you forsake him, he will forsake you.* Agreeably to this rule, God addressed the people, Jer. vii. 12. *Go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at first, and see what I did to it, for the wickedness of my people Israel.* Those, therefore, who enjoy the gospel, must not be high minded but fear. For if God spared not the natural branches, the seed of Abraham according to the flesh, but broke them off because of unbelief, let Gentile sin-

ners take heed, lest he also spare not them.—What was addressed to the church of Ephesus, Rev. ii. 5.—7. may be considered as spoken to all in a similar situation: *Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.* HE THAT HATH AN EAR, LET HIM HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT SAITH UNTO THE CHURCHES.

After explaining the subject, it only remains, before I proceed to the application, that I detain you a few moments, in shewing the actual accomplishment of the promise in the text. That it was verified under the Old Testament, we have sufficiently seen; and the outlines of its fulfilment under the New, are easily drawn.

At the beginning of the dispensation, on the day of Pentecost, the name of the Lord was gloriously recorded. He came agreeably to his promise, and dispensed his blessing. Three thousand were converted under one sermon; and these were only the first fruits of a great and plentiful harvest. Throughout the whole primitive gospel-ministry, the most evident tokens of the Divine presence, and a concurring blessing, were uniformly exhibited. God was with his servants, and bore them witness with divers signs and wonders, and there were added to the church daily such as should be saved.

In every succeeding age the Great JEHOVAH has remembered his inheritance. The blessing has been more copious at one time than another, but the promise has never totally failed. Under the persecutions of Imperial Rome, the Lord did not withdraw from his afflicted Zion. He gave his people strength equal to their day. He made the blood of the martyrs to prove a seed to the church; and caused the Gospel finally to triumph, against all the powerful efforts of Pagan superstition and cruelty.

During

During the long and dark period of Antichristian tyranny, when a train of fiery trials attended the faithful followers of the Redeemer, the presence of the Lord was abundantly experienced, and the promise sweetly accomplished. His little flock, hemmed in on every side by devouring wolves, obtained, in their pious assemblies, such confirmations of their faith, and such exalted consolations and encouragements, as rendered the church of Christ, even while groaning under the fiercest hatred of the church of Rome, a witness for the truth expressed in the text.

Since the happy Reformation, in different nations where his name has been recorded, the Lord has often manifested his Glory and Majesty, by astonishing displays of his presence and power in the sanctuary. And where the rich out-pourings of his Spirit have been suspended, he has still continued, by his more ordinary blessings, to be as the dew unto Israel. At all times he has fulfilled his gracious promise, and made himself known in Zion, as a God of Salvation. In this testimony, his people on every coast, and in every age, unite. This also we ourselves can witness this day. With us his name is recorded within these walls—he has formerly afforded us his presence. Here, in this very place, as well as in our other sanctuaries, he has often come and dispensed his blessing.

I have shewn you what we are to understand by the *name* of the Lord, and what is implied in his *recording* that name in any place. I have also pointed out the peculiar blessings promised to the sanctuary, and the faithfulness of God in accomplishing his word. Suffer me now to apply the subject. And,

First,

First, We learn, " that the Son of God, from the beginning to the end of the world, 'gathers, defends, and preserves to himself, by his Spirit and word, out of the whole human race, A CHURCH, chosen to everlasting life, and agreeing in true faith *." This church is but one, considered in its relation to the exalted Redeemer, the Head and King of Zion. It consists of many members. Millions are already in heaven, and constitute that part which may be called the church-triumphant. Millions are now on earth, who compose the church-militant. And millions more will yet be gathered, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

Interesting observations might be deduced from this subject, respecting the love of God towards his people—the safety of Zion—the communion of saints, and the discipline and government of the church. It might be proper, also, to attend to the marks of a true church—the distinguishing characteristic of a member, and the peculiar obligation upon all who enjoy the privileges of the sanctuary, to preserve them pure, and to be found faithful.—But it is impossible at present to enter upon these. I can only remind you, that you have seen it is not a mere form of words, or any ceremonies in the visible church, that can dedicate a temple to God, or render any building a consecrated sanctuary. Nothing less than recording the name of the Lord, by sound evangelical doctrine, and worshipping in spirit and in truth, can insure the blessing.

Secondly, We learn, that there is forgiveness with our God, that he may be feared; and thus a foundation laid for TRUE AND SPIRITUAL WORSHIP. The great object of religious adoration is clearly revealed, and a glorious way opened

* Heidelb. Catech. sect. xxi.

opened for our return to him. All the angels in heaven worship God, and they cease not day nor night in ascribing the homage, praise and thanksgiving, which are due to his holy name. Should we not, then, esteem it an unspeakable blessing and honour to be permitted to join in such exalted service? Ought we not to rejoice in liberty of access to the Father of our spirits, who, in sovereign mercy, has made himself known as the God of Salvation? It is in this faith, and with views and exercises founded upon these principles, that we adored the great JEHOVAH in those prayers, with which Divine service was just now opened in this house; and with this worship, in spirit and in truth, HIS NAME IS NOW RECORDED in this place.

Thirdly, We see, that the doctrines of the Gospel, like their Divine Author, are the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Larger measures of knowledge, and of the Spirit, may have been granted under one dispensation than another, but the nature and properties of saving faith are ever the same. The great Redeemer has always been precious to his people; and, in their Emmanuel, all the saints have ever found both *righteousness and strength*. Know then, my brethren, the God of your Salvation; and remember, that the PERFECT RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST is the sole meritorious cause of the justification of a sinner, and the basis on which every blessing in the SANCTUARY, as well as all your hopes for eternal life, are founded.— This righteousness the Son of God has wrought out, by his active and passive obedience, for all his people: This they receive by faith; and this the Father imputes to them, as he imputed to Christ their sins. *He who knew no sin*, says the Apostle, 2 Cor. v. 21. *was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him*. But how was Christ made sin for us? Not surely by partaking

taking in our depravity, nor having any sin inherent in himself; but, by having our sins imputed to him, that he, as a sin-offering and sacrifice, might atone for them. In like manner we are made righteous in him, not by any inherent righteousness in ourselves, but by having his righteousness imputed to us. The name by which he was known, under the Old Testament dispensation as well as the new, is the *Lord our righteousness*. Jer. xxiii. 6. But in what way can the righteousness of Christ become ours? It must be so inherently or imputatively.—There is no other alternative. But, is it inherently ours? Certainly no, for it is expressly opposed to all inherent righteousness in us, Phil. iii. 6. Nor can *that* be inherent in us, *which* was performed by Christ. It is, therefore, *OURS* by imputation. Wherefore God is said to *IMPUTE righteousness without works*. *This is that righteousness of God which is manifested without the law, being witnessed by the law and the prophets. This is the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ, unto all, and upon all them that believe.* By faith we are justified, in as much as we receive the offered salvation by the hand of faith. *Through* faith we are saved, as there is no other way of appropriating to ourselves the righteousness of the Surety, than by believing in him. But it is *not for* faith, nor any other work performed by us, or even graces wrought within us, that we obtain pardon for sin, and a right to eternal life. In the Redeemer alone God is well pleased, and for his sake alone is become the God and Father of all who are united to his Son. Faith is his gift, and every grace is bestowed by him.—This insures his glory in our justification, and is the only productive principle of sanctification in heart and life;—of that inherent holiness which constitutes moral rectitude, and without which no man can see God. These are the doctrines we profess
and

and believe. " We believe the Holy Ghost kindleth in our hearts an upright faith, which embraces Jesus Christ with all his merits, appropriates him, and seeks nothing more besides him. Therefore, we justly say with Paul, *that we are justified by faith alone; or, by faith without works.* However, we do not mean that faith itself justifies us, for it is only an instrument with which we embrace Christ our righteousness.—We believe that our salvation consists in the remission of our sins for Jesus Christ's sake, and that therein our righteousness before God is implied. As David and Paul teach us, declaring this to be the happiness of man, that God imputes righteousness to him without works; and, therefore, we always hold fast this foundation, ascribing all the glory to God, humbling ourselves before him, and acknowledging ourselves to be such as we really are, without presuming to trust in any thing in ourselves, or in any merit of ours, relying and resting upon the obedience of Christ crucified alone, which becomes ours when we believe in him. This is sufficient to cover all our iniquities, and to give us confidence in approaching to God; freeing the conscience of fear, terror, and dread. We believe, it is so far from being true, that this justifying faith makes men remiss in a holy and pious life, that on the contrary, without it they would never do any thing out of love to God, but only out of self-love, or fear of damnation. It is impossible that this holy faith can be unfruitful in man;—it is *a faith that worketh by love*, and excites man to the practice of those works, which God has commanded in his word.*" It is by preaching these evangelical truths the name of the Lord, as a God of Salvation, is this day recorded in this house. And now witness these walls! which have often reverberated the joyful sound of peace on earth,

and

* Confession of Faith, art. xxii. xxiii. xxiv.

and good will to men. Witness ye columns! and thou lofty arch! renewed and decorated with that simple magnificence which becomes a temple under the New Testament. Witness ye angels! who, while invisible to us, are ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation, and who rejoice in the purity of our worship, and the conversion of sinners. And O! be thou also witness, exalted King of Zion! who holdest the stars of the church in thy right hand, and whose eyes are as a flame of fire; witness thou, if ever false doctrines are taught in this house;—if ever we refuse to reverence thee! Great God of Abraham, our God and Father, to whom this building is again consecrated! *Let thine eyes be open toward this house night and day, even towards the place, of which thou hast said, My name shall be there. Make the priests lips to keep knowledge, and teach them to seek the law at thy mouth. Purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may always offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.*

To these great purposes this building was formerly devoted, and for these important ends it is now raised from its ruins. But the mention of RUINS calls back our thoughts to past scenes, and presents disagreeable ideas to our minds. When destruction is caused by the immediate hand of heaven;—by earthquakes, storms, or fire, we are silent before God, and dare not reply. But when men have been the instruments, it is difficult, although proper, to look up to the over-ruling Power, and forget the interposition of the means. I dare not speak of the wanton cruelty of those who destroyed this temple, nor repeat the various indignities which have been perpetrated. It would be easy to mention facts which would chill your blood! A recollection of the groans of dying prisoners, which pierced this ceiling; or the sacrilegious sports and

rough feats of horsemanship* exhibited within these walls, might raise sentiments in your minds that would, perhaps, not harmonize with those religious affections, which I wish, at present, to promote, and always to cherish.

The Lord has sufficiently vindicated our cause, and avenged us of those who rose up against us.—He girded our Joshua for the field, and led him, with his train of heroes, to victory. Heaven directed our councils, and wrought deliverance.—Our enemies themselves acknowledged an interposing Providence, and were obliged to say, *The Lord hath done great things for them*, while we repeated the shout of praise, **THE LORD HATH DONE GREAT THINGS FOR US, WHEREOF WE ARE GLAD.**

Through the long avenue of dangers and perplexity, while discouragements, like dark clouds, were hovering all around, who could penetrate the gloom, and foresee, that God would so soon bring order out of confusion;—so soon dismiss the horrors of war, and grant an honourable peace;—a perfect revolution? Where was it ever seen, excepting only in Israel, *that God took a nation out of the midst of another nation, with such a mighty hand, and a stretched out arm?* Who could have predicted, that from such indigested materials, with such short experience, and within so few years, an efficient, liberal, and pervading government would have been formed?—A station and rank is now obtained among the nations of the earth; and, if the full enjoyment of civil and religious liberty is a constituent part of social happiness;—if the prospects of the rising importance, strength, and greatness of our new empire, are of any weight in the scale, we may safely pronounce ourselves, at this day, to be the happiest nation in the world. A nation where all the rights of man

are

* This church was, during the first part of the war, made a prison, and afterwards turned, by the British troops, into a riding-school.

are perfectly secured. Without a monarchy;—without hereditary nobility, and without an hierarchy. Hail, happy land! A land of liberty!—of science!—of religion! Here an undisturbed freedom in worship forms the first principle of an equal government, and is claimed as a birthright, which none of our rulers dare call in question or controul. Here no sect is legally preferred with exclusive prerogatives;—the chief magistrate worships as a private citizen, and legislators, by their influential example, not by penal laws, prove nursing fathers to the church of Christ. In this happy and elevated situation, the ruins of our temples, and all we have sustained, appear a price too small to mention. We are more than compensated. We have forgiven, and we forget past injuries. God has abundantly made up for all our former griefs. *When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream.—Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing.* We are a happy people;—we feel and know that we are so. The labours of the husbandman prosper, and there is plenty in all our borders. Commerce is enlarged, and public credit established. The education of youth is universally patronized, and there is no complaining in our streets.—In safety we sit, every man under his own vine and fig-tree, and there are none to make us afraid.—With sufficient room to accommodate nations, and a government adequate to all the important purposes of society, we are not only at ease ourselves, but extend our arms, and cordially invite an oppressed world to come under our shade, and share in our happiness. Happy is that people that is in such a case! yea, happy is that people WHOSE GOD IS THE LORD!—Whether we shall continue thus happy, will greatly depend upon our wisdom and justice;—our industry and manners, but principally upon our faithfully
recording

recording the name of the Lord. According to the measure in which the religion of the blessed Jesus is honoured and prevails, our land will be truly happy, and our liberty secure. This holy religion establishes the purest morality, and inculcates the reciprocal obligations which members of society are under to each other: It engages men of all ranks, by the highest sanctions, conscientiously to fulfil the duties of their station; and it is, without controversy, the surest pledge of the Divine protection. The maintainance of this, in its purity, will most effectually establish our invaluable blessings, and as this declines, our ruin will hasten. See the rule of Providence with respect to nations, Jer. xviii. 9, 10. *At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; if it do evil in my sight, that it OBEY NOT MY VOICE, then I will repent of the good wherewith I said, I would benefit them.*

While others, at our political anniversary, in their animated orations, employ all the powers of eloquence, to confirm your love of liberty, and, by enraptured views of civil blessings, touch with transport all the springs of life; I desire, with plainness of speech, but with a zeal becoming a minister of the Gospel, to raise your views to heaven, and persuade you wisely to improve your precious privileges. Seven years are not yet elapsed since we returned to this city in peace. And lo! in less than seven years, two ruined churches have been by us repaired. The Lord hath strengthened our hands, and given success to our efforts. Let a humble sense of our dependence upon him, and a recollection of his numerous mercies, call forth lively gratitude upon this occasion. *Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his be-*

ness. It is, my brethren, a circumstance which, upon our part, is altogether fortuitous ; but it deserves your notice, that in the direction of Providence, you have more than one object, upon this memorable Fourth of July, that claims your attention. While you glow with patriotic ardour for your country, and pour out fervent prayers for its rising honour and happiness; you are also exulting that the gates of this house are again opened to you. *Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise ; be thankful unto him, and bless his name.* With ardent prayers, and solemn vows, I know you now unite with me in this sacred exercise ; and may your ardent prayers and solemn vows be ratified in heaven ! but suffer me, in faithfulness, to warn you against the deceitfulness of your hearts towards God, and to charge you to mingle a holy fear and trembling this day with our rejoicings. Remember Shiloh,—remember what has already befallen this house, and never forget that you have to do with a holy God who is jealous for his honour and worship.—Holiness becometh the house of God for ever ; and all who name the name of Christ must depart from iniquity. *Keep, therefore, thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to bear, than to give the sacrifice of fools. When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it, for he hath no pleasure in fools. Pay that which thou hast vowed.*

With what humble awe, and pious reverence, should ministers of the Gospel engage in the service of the sanctuary ! Upon us, my venerable and respected colleagues, a new burden is this day laid,—to us a new door is opened ! I congratulate you on this auspicious occasion, and hope we may view it as a token for good from the Lord. Let it encourage us to persevere and become more faith-

ful in preaching a crucified Jesus, and inciting this people to worship God in spirit and in truth. But where is our LAIDLIE *! Where is now that bold herald of the Gospel, who feared not the face of man, nor courted the applause of fellow-worms!—He spoke with authority, and what flowed from his heart reached the hearts of others. How often from these heights of Zion have his words dropped as the rain, while sinners trembled, and saints rejoiced. But he is gone, and rests from his labours! His name still survives, and he, being dead, yet speaketh. Excuse this tribute of affection,—forgive this tear, which I owe to the memory of a man, who was once dear to me, as a fellow-labourer in this house, and whose ministry was highly acceptable, and greatly blessed to this people. From the example of those who proved faithful in their day, let us, my worthy colleagues, be prompted to the most vigorous exertions in the service of our Master. May you be long spared in mercy to the church! and, when the lips, which now address you, are mouldering in the tomb, O may you live to record the name of the Lord, and be the happy instruments of building that spiritual temple which is founded upon the Prophets and Apostles, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone! Late, very late, after gaining many seals to your ministry, may you close your

* The Reverend Dr Archibald Laidlie was born and educated in Scotland. He was ordained in 1760 a minister in Flushing in Zealand. The Dutch Church in New-York finding it necessary to have divine service performed in English, called him for that purpose, and he arrived here in March 1764. He was a man of genius, learning, and eminent piety; a very instructive, bold and animated preacher; and his indefatigable labours were eminently blessed of the Lord. He died of a consumptive illness at Red-Hook, in October 1779, during our exile from the city.

your exemplary and useful lives in peace, and obtain the crown of righteousness ! The blessing of the God of salvation be upon you !

The aged men who were present at the dedication of the second temple wept at the remembrance of the first. But, blessed be God ! you, who worshipped in this house formerly, have no cause for weeping on that account. This house is restored to its former splendor, and the Lord has exceeded our highest expectations. We have no reason to weep for the house ; but we may weep and be ashamed for the hardness of our hearts, for the want of faith and gratitude, of love and holiness. Many bitter tears might also be shed, when looking around, we find so many wanting, who used formerly to worship with us in this place. Alas ! how many parents, — how many husbands and wives, — how many children and friends, have gone down to the silent grave since last we assembled in this house ! But I may not indulge the mournful recollection. The joy of the Lord is to be our strength this day. May you, my brethren, be spared to go up with the multitude to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise : May you live to see his power and glory in the sanctuary, and your souls be fed as with marrow and fatness ! The Lord bless you with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus !

You who are young, behold the goodness of God in providing the means of grace, and bringing the Gospel in its purity to you ! Remember to whom we have dedicated this place. The once crucified, but now exalted Jesus, is Lord of this house. Here his name is recorded. See to it that you never defile his temple ; make not his house a house of merchandise, nor sell his truths. Yet a little while, and we shall bid adieu to ordinances and to you. But we rejoice in the prospect of leaving you the rich treasure

treasure of a faithful profession and spiritual worship. Preserve with anxious solicitude the precious inheritance. It is your life, it is the pledge of all your mercies. Improve the means. Search the Scriptures. Understand the doctrines you profess. Rest not in a name to live; but look unto Jesus, and find life and peace in him. *Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.* Beware of ever being ashamed of Christ. Sin not away your privileges, and provoke not a holy God to withdraw his presence and blessing.

It is not, my children, without very tender emotions, that we look around and consider you as our dearest hope; our highest joy; the rising pillars of the Church and State. Soon you are to succeed us in the duties we now strive to fulfil. Very soon you will have to bear the sacred burden which will devolve from us to you. I charge you in the sight of God to be faithful. Be faithful to your country, be faithful to the church. Forsake not assembling yourselves together. Record the blessed name. Continue to record it, that God may dwell with you, and with your children's children, as long as the sun shall endure. *But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold the heaven, and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him, how much less this house which we have built?* The heaven is indeed his throne, and the earth is his footstool; but here is the house that we have built unto him, and here is the place of his rest. May it ever be a house of prayer! A house of praise! A house of blessings! *Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces. For my brethren and companions sake, I will now say, PEACE BE WITHIN THEE. Because of the house of the Lord our God, I WILL SEEK THY GOOD.* Great King of Zion,

Zion, fill it with thy glory ! When writing up the people, let it be counted that many were born here, and here trained up for that house, which is not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Bless all thy churches ! Let *Israel* be saved ! And, from the rising of the sun, even to the going down of the same, let thy name be great among the Gentiles. In every place let incense be offered unto thy name, and a pure offering ! AMEN.

F I N I S .